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**THE TIES THAT BIND:  
JAMAICAN ELDERS'  
TESTIMONIES OF COMMUNITY LIFE**

By

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**THESIS**  
**Submitted to the Department of Psychology**  
**in partial fulfilment of the requirements**  
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**2000**

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the meanings of community, participation, activism and being old with eight older Jamaicans. The roles of culture and religion are examined in reference to the participants' community and social aging experiences. The researcher used a culturally relevant research paradigm [Diasporic African] incorporating indigenous methods [testifying] grounded in the participants' cultural and religious identities and experiences as older Christian Jamaicans of African descent. The use of testimonies is described in Stanfield's (1998) work on ethnic modelling in qualitative research design. Demographic information and life histories focussing on community roles, sites for participation across the life span, and the meaning of community experiences in later years were derived from the participants' testimonies. The participants, seven women interviewed in Jamaica and one man interviewed while he was on vacation in Canada, ranged in age from 70 to 102 years old. The average interview length was 45 minutes.

The data analysis process involved an intuitive process of highlighting convergent and divergent experiences within the testimonies. Common words and phrases were coded as thematic categories. Memos, categorizing strategies and contextualizing strategies were also used as prescribed in Maxwell's (1996) work on qualitative research design. Participants' responses for the meanings of community and participation reflect the values of sharing, giving, and unity. The participants defined being old by making reference to the Biblical concept of "three-score and ten." All of the participants identified themselves as old; however, they stated that "you are old as you feel," indicating that they perceived an attitudinal component to their identity as older persons. For the eight older persons in this study, activism was not a relevant term; however, a few individuals'

community involvements included activities that were more indicative of advocacy efforts. Overall the eight elders were involved in care-giving, income-generating, recreational, civic, and religious activities.

“Sharing,” “giving,” and “being together” were the words participants used to describe community participation. Connectedness, relationship, and the concept of the collective are interpreted as extensions to the participants’ words. The findings are discussed in relation to cultural legacies and religious values found in Jamaican culture that is derived from the synthesis of African, Aboriginal and European elements. The author argues that the value for the collective [collectivism] is derived from the African cultural legacy within Jamaica. Jamaica is discussed as a sociocultural context embedded within the sociocultural contexts of the Caribbean and Latin America, the Americas, and the African diaspora. Descriptions of the traditional and changing roles of older persons within these sociocultural and geopolitical entities are presented to contextualize the participants’ experiences of community and growing older. Factors influencing the changing role of seniors in Jamaica are also discussed, as well as the opportunities that exist for capacity-building efforts. Empowerment is inferred from the participants’ testimonies and the researcher’s observations. Arguments are presented supporting the relevance of the study’s findings to community psychology particularly where the experiences of older persons in the English-speaking Caribbean are unrepresented.

**Key Words:** Older persons, social aging, community, participation, activism, being old, empowerment, collectivism, Jamaica, the English-speaking Caribbean, the Americas, the African diaspora, contextualization of community experience, and community psychology.

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing this thesis was an ordeal. At times I lost sight of what was important and became distracted by life's other concerns. At times, the thesis loomed larger than life itself. Ultimately, my faith in God provided me with the inspiration, motivation, and courage to complete this endeavour. Praise and thanks giving are my offerings to *my* author and finisher God and to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for this empowering experience. This is my testimony!

I would like to thank the eight elders in Jamaica, Ally, Bych, Mrs. Frankson, Mr. Gordon, Lanni, Mrs. Lynch, Ms. Murray, and Mrs. W, for sharing *their* testimonies with me and ultimately, with you the reader. I am thankful for their participation and for their prayers. They reminded me that my community knows no geographic boundary. I am indebted to Mrs. Verona O'Connor, the Kingston Organizer for the National Council of Senior Citizens who escorted me to several of the interviews and introduced me to active seniors in Kingston, Jamaica. I am also indebted to Mrs. Vera Prince at the Council who also escorted me to the August Town Seniors' Club meeting and introduced me to Mrs. W. I wish also to thank all of the elders I met at the various meetings for their hospitality and generosity. They were welcoming and I felt at home. I also extend gratitude to Dr. Denise Eldemire at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, who provided me with copies of her own articles and those published by Caribbean researchers in Caribbean journals that do not make their way into North American journals. I appreciate her comments regarding how the North American hegemony in knowledge production and dissemination, impacts on scholarship generated in the Caribbean.

I was fortunate to have academic advisors with soul who provided me with moral support over the long journey. I thank my advisor, Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers for his patience and support



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*My village is huge and my kinships many -- blessings to all!*

## ***Dedications***

*I dedicate this work in loving memory of my father, Mr. Alexander Sylvester Russell, who had a vision and a plan, and put them in action. He was a man of great faith. My father taught me that loving your neighbour means that you must also love yourself. He was my first instructor in anti-oppression consciousness and practice. It was through him that I internalized the values of community and commitment. In his later years, he initiated the Caribbean-Canadian Seniors Club so to address the social and political needs of Toronto's growing population of Caribbean seniors. Dad, although you are not physically present, I feel your continued presence in this life.*

*I know that you have gone back to join the ancestors. Until we meet again.*

*I also pay tribute to Mr. Sterling Anges Gordon, an "honourable" man who shared his testimony with me. His true love for his family and his community were immeasurable and irreplaceable. Mr. Gordon travelled his earthly journey with God. He has left this life and has travelled back home.*

*To all of the elders who continue to pass along their knowledge of culture and practice of faith, you are our griots. You remind us that love, sharing and unity can have a profound effect, for without these elements, community ceases to exist.*

*"Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me. O God,  
till I declare your power to the next generation,  
your might to all who are to come."*

**Psalms 71:19**

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Dedications</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>.xiii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>An Aging world</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Aging in the Americas</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>The Feminization of Aging</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>The Changing Contexts and Roles for Older Persons</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Aging in Jamaica</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Community Resources</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>A Context within Contexts: Jamaica, the Caribbean, the Americas, and     the African Diaspora</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>The Americas</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>The Caribbean</b> .....	<b>11</b>

<b>Jamaica</b> .....	14
<b>The African Diaspora</b> .....	17
<b>Aging as a Social Process</b> .....	19
<b>The Location of Older Persons within Community Psychology</b> .....	24
<b>Definitions of Community, Participation, and Empowerment</b> .....	28
<b>Community</b> .....	28
<b>Participation</b> .....	28
<b>Empowerment</b> .....	29
<b>The Purpose for this Study</b> .....	30
<b>Methodology</b> .....	34
<b>A Culturally Relevant Paradigm</b> .....	34
<b>The Research Context</b> .....	39
<b>Empowerment of Participants</b> .....	40
<b>The Research Design</b> .....	41
<b>The Participants</b> .....	41
<b>Entry to Settings</b> .....	41
<b>Settings</b> .....	42
<b>Ethical Considerations</b> .....	42
<b>Interview Procedure</b> .....	43
<b>Other Data Collection Methods</b> .....	43
<b>The Research Relationship</b> .....	44

Risks and Benefits .....	44
Feedback .....	45
<b>The Findings .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Elders' Testimonies .....</b>	<b>46</b>
Ally .....	48
Bych .....	51
Lanni .....	54
Mrs. Lynch .....	57
Mrs. Murray .....	60
Mr. Gordon .....	64
Mrs. W. ....	67
Mrs. Frankson .....	69
<b>Witnessing: Analyzing the Data .....</b>	<b>72</b>
1. Settings: .....	75
2. Roles .....	77
3. Lessons: Elders' reflections and definitions on community, participation and on being old. ....	80
Participation .....	80
Community: .....	81
Activism .....	82

<b>Community Participation and Activism.</b> .....	84
<b>On Being Old</b> .....	84
<b>Involvement and Stage of Life</b> .....	87
<b>4. Perceived Social Context</b> .....	87
<b>Intergenerational Relationships.</b> .....	88
<b>Challenges to Seniors</b> .....	90
<b>Discussion: Culture and Spirituality in Community Participation Among the Elders</b> .....	95
<b>The role of contextual reality in the lives of Jamaican elders</b> .....	96
<b>The role of cultural legacies</b> .....	99
<b>Community participation as an act of resistance</b> .....	103
<b>Spirituality of the elders</b> .....	108
<b>Community psychology and Jamaican elders</b> .....	115
<b>Contribution to the literature</b> .....	119
<b>Future directions</b> .....	123
<b>Future research</b> .....	124
<b>Strengths and weaknesses of this study</b> .....	125
<b>What I gained from this study</b> .....	128
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	130
<b>References</b> .....	134

<b>Appendix A. Information Letter</b> .....	<b>148</b>
<b>Appendix B. Consent Form</b> .....	<b>150</b>
<b>Appendix C. Interview Guide</b> .....	<b>152</b>
<b>Appendix D.</b> .....	<b>153</b>
<b>Roles - Community Involvement as Youth Table 1.</b> .....	<b>153</b>
<b>Roles: Community Involvement as Adults Table 2.</b> .....	<b>154</b>
<b>Roles: Community Involvement as Older Persons Table 3.</b> .....	<b>155</b>
<b>Meanings: Table 4.</b> .....	<b>156</b>
<b>Settings: Table 5.</b> .....	<b>157</b>
<b>Appendix E. Glossary</b> .....	<b>158</b>



## **Preface**

For two weeks in July 1998, I had the great pleasure of speaking with eight older persons in Jamaica. During these conversations, these elders told me about their lives as young people, parents, and elders, and about participation in community life. What follows in this thesis is an account of those conversations, and what I felt they were saying about their lives. When we think of action, fluidity, and movement, we often do not picture someone who is old in years. However, these are the words that come to mind when I think about the older persons with whom I conversed while conducting this research. What is more important is that these persons considered themselves active participants in their own lives and in the lives of their communities.

I choose to focus on the experiences of Jamaican seniors for a variety of reasons. First, I sought to do research that would reflect some aspect of personal experience. Originally, I wanted to do a thesis looking at Afrocentric educational programs (Russell, 1996) for African-Canadian children and youth. In the process of completing my graduate courses, however, other elements of my life forced me to look at something more personal. I guess I am in what most people would call the "sandwich generation," that stage of life between the young and the old. For many of us in this stage, this time can be challenging and stressful as both the young and the old persons in our lives may require attention and care. However, this "sandwich" stage of the family life cycle also presents us with an opportunity. I see it as both a challenge and an opportunity. Like the Sankofa bird, a West African symbol whose feet are pointed forward while it looks back, I occupy a vantage point nestled between the past and the future where I too must look back in order to go forward. I have the opportunity, through observing my parents and other older persons, to learn how to age successfully. Listening to the stories of older persons allowed me to see them as young persons

while looking at them in the present, and imagining them in the future. Through my son, I see and remember my childhood, my past, who I was and how I became who I am. Through my parents, I see the future and whom I could become.

During the year that I completed course work, I did not encounter community psychology research reflecting the experiences of older persons. Older third-world persons' experiences of aging and of community participation seemed to be an area of research yet to be explored to any great extent by community psychologists. Similarly, community psychological research with older Jamaicans is nonexistent. The politics and economics of research inquiry have probably influenced the limited amounts of community psychology research documenting of the experiences of third world persons, particularly in the English-speaking Caribbean. Limited research funding, the location of community psychology programs predominantly in North America and other industrial nations, and perhaps assumptions regarding the traditional status of older persons in third world countries are plausible factors that have inhibited community psychology's participation in research with older persons in the Caribbean. Perhaps researchers presumed that most older Caribbean persons occupied positions of authority and privilege within the family and community, positions that would not be a focus of community psychological inquiry because the field aims to facilitate the empowerment of the disadvantaged, underprivileged and marginalized segments in society. However, my own observations of how I saw Jamaican society changing, and having aging parents, prompted me to look closely at what elders there experience.

Much of what I absorbed about older persons was from North America's mass media. The media depicted older persons as feeble-minded, oriented in the past, weak-voiced and as leading slow paced lives. On the other hand, youth was represented by images of persons with quick wits, active,

energetic, oriented toward the future, involved in fast paced lifestyles. However, a curious thing is happening as the North American population is aging. Retirement is depicted as a phase of life in which those who wisely invest while young can enjoy an active lifestyle in the future -- a life filled with sports cars, boats, and vacations in sunny destinations.

However, my observations of older persons in my life, namely my parents, their friends, and older relatives convinced me that the aging process is as varied as the individuals who are going through it. To some individuals being old is just a number. To these individuals, wittiness, being a person who does things quickly, or community involvements did not begin and end in youth. I saw this in my father who passed away during the writing of this thesis. He retained his razor-sharp mind and remained connected with his community until the very moment of his last breath. Similarly, Mr. Gordon, an interview participant was quick witted and spry until his death, four months before my father passed away. Old age need not be a time of loss, but can be a time to fine tune skills, abilities, and other gifts, or learn new lessons. The passing of my father and Mr. Gordon points to another phenomenon, the feminization of old age. It was no accident that most of the participants in the study were women, as the ratio of women to men increases with age. Women perhaps engage in health-protective behaviours that are responsible for this phenomenon.

My own positionality poses another point of interest. I am an African-Canadian woman and much more. I am the daughter of older Jamaicans who emigrated to Canada almost half a century ago. I call myself an acculturated Jamaican. My parents who were proud of their heritage and aware of racism, instilled within me Jamaican cultural values, insights, and knowledge in order that I might have a sense of home, and a sense of place. Yet, being born and raised in Canada, I have been socialized to Canadian values as well. W. E. B. DuBois (see Shepperson, 1976) in describing the

cultural experience and socialization process of African-Americans<sup>1</sup> coined the term bi-culturalism. Similarly, my experience as a Black child growing up in Canada during the seventies with strains of Pan-Africanist sentimentality and with Jamaican parents has influenced my world view, one that reflects diasporic African, Jamaican, and Canadian influences. Growing up in Toronto, Canada I had the privilege of being exposed to a diasporically-diverse African-Canadian community that provided me with a global African perspective. Like many African-Canadians with West Indian roots, I have relatives back home in Jamaica, and in Europe, and North America, and in-laws from mother Africa, developing a global African consciousness was not difficult for me. Thus, I feel uniquely positioned and privileged in this work with Jamaican seniors, as I can relate their experiences to Jamaican culture, and to the larger contexts of the Caribbean, the Americas, and the African diaspora.

As a researcher, I simultaneously occupy emic and etic positions in relation to the research participants. I occupy an etic position because I am not a senior and because I was born and raised in Canada. I occupy an emic position because I was socialized with Jamaican cultural values and like the participants in this study, I am also a Christian. I also have the vantage point of being an insider and an outsider simultaneously -- a vantage point that is ideal for this research.

Because age is bound to the concept of the passage of time, I feel it necessary to make a statement about differing concepts of time. In Afrocentric epistemology, the concept of time is linked to events, is past and present time oriented, and cyclical in movement (Pennington, 1990). In contrast, the Eurocentric epistemology emphasizes a concept of time as progressing in a linear fashion toward an infinite future destination. Within an African world view, the future is not

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<sup>1</sup>Diasporic Africans refers to the descendants of continental Africans dispersed around the world as the result of European colonisation and slavery. Diasporic Africans in the Americas are referred to as African-American by several writers (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997; Davis, 1995).

conceptualized in the same way it is in a European world view, in that there is no attempt to predict future events within the African perspective. Pleasing ancestors is a way to avoid misfortune beyond the present. Thus, to envision a future is to look back and to commune with the ancestors.

This thesis was born out my personal need to know what that recipe is for successful maturing. The conversations with the elders represent an opportunity to tap into their collective wisdom. What I have learned about Jamaicans specifically and other diasporic African peoples is that we have learned to evoke the inspiration necessary to create, recreate, and redefine our cultural values and experiences to adapt to the changes in our social environments. Jamaicans and other diasporic Africans took elements of African religions and fused them with European Christianity to create new religious forms or follow both separately. Thus, when I speak about the communing of ancestors, I also speak about the communing of saints. Similarly, they transform the act of telling the story into the act of testifying from an African Caribbean Christian perspective. The conversations between the study participants and myself constitute a synthesis of the "testimonies" of the saints and messages from the ancestors.

Ultimately, the older persons in this project told me stories about their interfacing with the collective -- the community that empowers, inspires, and sustains them which in turn they empower, inspire, and sustain.

Sankofa

## **Introduction**

To begin life is to begin the aging process. Aging is a natural process that starts from the moments of the first breath unto the last. However, the term aging generally refers to the process experienced by older persons. The process entails changes in the way we move, process information, the things we are able to do, and the way we feel physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Our physical and social environments influence how we experience aging in later years. Our social environment, which includes our family, kinship groups, community, the culture and society we live in, provides us with lenses through which to observe our aging processes. Ultimately, the aging process is a subjective and personal experience that depends on how we negotiate the social environment's reflection of us.

This research deals with a number of issues. Primarily, I examine the community experience of some older Jamaicans. However, to do this I will present an overview on the global demographic trend toward population aging and aging throughout the Americas and Latin America and the Caribbean. I also note the trend toward the feminization of aging, particularly with regard to women living in developing countries. Following the section on aging in the Aging in the Americas, I discuss the changing contexts and roles for older persons in the Caribbean. Subsequently, I present an overview of aging in Jamaica. In order to explore the roles of cultural context and identity in older persons' experiences of aging and community involvement, I provide a brief historical overview on the development of the Americas, the Caribbean and Latin America, Jamaica and the African Diaspora. I include a reference to the African diaspora as a cultural context from which to view the aging and community experiences of older Jamaicans, the majority of whom are people of African descent, to examine parallels in the roles of older persons in other communities of African

peoples. Then, I return to look at major perspectives in aging research. Subsequently, I examine the location of research with older persons within the field of community psychology, particularly with regard to the community experiences of older persons living within the Caribbean, hence Jamaica. The final section of this introduction includes the purpose for my study.

### **An aging world**

Nineteen-hundred and ninety-nine was declared as the International Year of the Older Person by the United Nations. Older persons are described as persons 60 years and older (WHO, 1999). There has been some recognition of and the statistics reveal that the world's population is aging. According to statistics from the World Health Organization's Aging and Health Programme, the world's population of persons 60 years and older is 580 million. In 2020 this figure is expected to rise to one billion, representing a 75 percent increase compared to a 50 percent increase for the whole population (WHO, 1999). The population of persons 60 years and older is increasing faster than for the population as a whole.

Around the world, in recent years, increases in life expectancy at birth have been accompanied by decreases in fertility rates and infant mortality rates.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the proportion of the world's population at age 60, as well as the number of people living to a very old age, 80 years and older, has increased. In 1993, for example, persons 80 years and older constituted 16 percent of the older population over 65 years and older. The projected growth for this population will rise to 30 percent over the next 30 years (PAHO, 1999). Thus, the aging of the world's population reflects declining fertility and mortality rates combined with increased life expectancy. We are

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<sup>2</sup>The World Health Organization (1999) cited decreases in fertility rates as the number of children a woman is expected to have declined between 1970 and 1998 for the following countries as examples: India, 5.9 to 3.1; Brazil, 5.1 to 2.2; and China, 5.5 to 2.1.

having fewer children and living longer. Eventually the majority population will consist of older persons.

Population aging is the term used for this trend toward increased numbers of people living to an older age while few children are born (WHO, 1999). Not only are we living longer, but many of us are living more healthily as well. Some of the factors that contribute to the world's aging population are medical advancements, health promotion, greater access to health resources, improved water conditions and nutrition, the elimination or control of some fatal diseases, and decreasing fertility rates (PAHO, 1999).

**Aging in the Americas.** The World Health Organization (1999) reported that over 60 percent of the world's population of persons 60 years and older live in developing countries such as in Latin America and the Caribbean. The rate of growth of the older population, 60 years and older is higher than for the total population of the Americas. For example, by 2010 the older population will be three and half times as high as that of the total population (PAHO, 1999). Countries with the highest proportions of persons 60 years and older are referred to as the "oldest" countries in demographic terms; they are the following, Uruguay (17.3 percent), the United States (16.5 percent), and Canada (16.3 percent). In comparing regions, "the Caribbean is the oldest region of the world, with 10 percent of its aggregate population aged 60 years and over" (PAHO, 1999). Similar to worldwide trends, in the Americas, the oldest-old, persons 75 years and older, are living longer and represent the fastest growing population. In Latin American countries, the proportion of persons 75 years and older is only one to 2 percent of the population, while in the Caribbean it is between three and 4 percent. In Brazil, for example, the population of persons 75 years and older is expected to jump from 1.9 million in 1990 to 7.1 million in 2020 (PAHO, 1999).



In the past leading causes of death were from infectious and acute diseases. Currently, the leading causes of death are chronic and degenerative diseases. However, deaths due to chronic and degenerative disease usually occur in old age. The countries that report the highest proportion of all deaths, those due to chronic, degenerative, acute and infectious diseases, and accidents, for persons 65 and older are 74 percent for Canada, 72 percent for the United States, and 68 percent for Uruguay. On the other hand the countries that report the lowest proportions of all deaths occurring above 65 and older are 31 percent for Nicaragua, 35 percent for Peru, and 38 percent in El Salvador. Circulatory diseases, those related to the heart, blood and lymphatic system, are the principal cause of death in the majority of countries in the Americas (PAHO, 1999).

Long term care, institutionalization, and pension reform are issues that must be dealt with since the oldest old populations consume greater amounts of health care resources than do younger populations.

**The Feminization of Aging.** Aging in the Americas is a gender issue as well. In 1997, for persons between the ages 60 and 64 years, there were 94 men per 100 women. While at age 80 years and older, there are 53 men for every 100 women in that same year. Although most older men are married, most older women are widowed due to living longer than men, marrying men older than themselves, and remarrying less frequently after the loss of a spouse. In countries that do not provide adequate income security or where these provisions are nonexistent, widows who are illiterate, lack financial savings, and may have some form of disability are a vulnerable population. Often widows in poorer countries are dependent upon younger family members for economic support (PAHO, 1999). Similarly, in weaker economies younger family members themselves may be financially vulnerable and, therefore, are unable to support dependent older persons in their families. To

reiterate, a majority of the world's older population resides in developing nations. Many developing countries are challenged by economic and political difficulties and are unable to provide adequate health care and social resources for older persons in need. The challenge in the developing world is to create provisions in the face of scarcity. In the next section, I discuss the impact of contexts in transition on the roles of older persons within their families and communities.

### **The changing contexts and roles for older persons in the Caribbean**

The change from a rural / agriculture-based economy to an urban / industrial-based economy has had implications for family values, roles, and structure of the Caribbean family. For instance, there are some indications that older persons residing in rural settings may experience fewer tensions and conflicts that many older persons living in urban settings experience due to a loss of status, esteem, and unfavourable housing (Eldemire, 1997b). Furthermore, the value accorded older family members and the roles they play in the family and community has changed as well. Cross cultural research has shown that increasing modernization, neocolonialism, and structural adjustments have been associated with the decreasing status of older persons in Jamaica (DeHaney, 1987; Eldemire, 1994) and Nepal (Goldstein, Schuler, & Ross, 1983), and overall social decline in Jamaica. Yet, other researchers cite modern education, migration patterns, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) as factors influencing the breakdown of the traditional family in developing countries (Tout, 1989). In previous times, older persons were valued for their experience, knowledge, skills' mastery, and wisdom. However, society's attempts to keep pace with global technological and economic changes are accompanied by increasing value for the technological knowledge of younger persons and indifference to the wisdom of elders (McPherson, 1998). Global economics and structural changes have adverse implications for third world nations whose

governments are hard pressed to provide adequate social support for older persons. Older persons in third world nations are at risk for developing adverse social and health problems, which further taxes overburdened systems.

In many developing nations, such as those in the Caribbean, older persons occupied positions of authority and were highly respected family heads (Alleyne, 1988; Eldemire, 1997b). Through their life experience, knowledge, wisdom, and the supportive functions they provided for the family and community, older persons benefitted from reciprocal relationships with family and community. These relationships were characterized by interdependence and mutually beneficial exchanges that ensured support for the young and the old. Financial assistance, housing, and personal care were resources traditionally provided within extended families along with some assistance from neighbours, church members and others in the community. Thus, the family and community could be said to be the traditional sources of support for individuals in old age. However, the traditional family and community supports in old age are vanishing within the Caribbean. Many families are not in an economic position to provide financial assistance and housing to older family members. In some cases, older persons continue to work past retirement age and seek support from people other than their family members in order to survive. In other cases, seniors have formed cooperative ventures in order to support each other psychologically, socially, economically, and physically, such as through income-generating project, shared housing and home visitations (Eldemire, 1994, 1997b).

If families in third world nations are experiencing changes in roles, values, and structure due to modernization, urbanization, and the other economic, technological, political and societal changes, then families in Jamaica are not immune from the effects of these global phenomena. My first purpose then for doing this research was to learn from elders in Jamaica what the experience of aging

is for them. Although I had my own notions regarding the value placed on relatedness, community, and involvement, I sought to learn what community participation meant for older Jamaicans. Furthermore, I suspected that the roles for elders in the family and community in Jamaica may be changing, however, their response to the change may or may not be unique. The various factors affecting families in other countries such as increased urbanization, decreased family size, and unemployment are the same factors facing Jamaican families and hence, Jamaican seniors (Brathwaite, 1989; WHO, 1999). Yet, there are contextual particularities such as the social, economic, and political pressures due to development and structural adjustments, and cultural legacies that may make the aging experience for Jamaican seniors somewhat unique (DeHaney, 1987; Eldemire, 1994). In addition, Jamaica as a part of the African diaspora may share with other places where African people reside in significant numbers some common experiences among elders (Alleyne, 1988; Davis, 1995).

### **Aging in Jamaica**

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 1999) estimates that the Jamaican population 60 years and older will rise from 238,863 persons (9.1 percent) to 502,256 (15 percent) of the national total population by 2025. Meanwhile, the proportion of persons 75 years and older will rise from 2.8 percent in 1997 to 3.8 percent by 2025. The ratio of persons aged 60 years and older to the number of youths 15 years and younger is represented by the aging index. Between 1997 and 2025, the aging index for Jamaica will rise from 28 to 72, meaning there will be fewer young persons to the number of older persons. Having fewer younger persons of employment age translates into a decreased labour force and fewer workers contributing toward Jamaica's tax base, which contributes to the social security fund. Meanwhile, the numbers of persons who will require social

security in Jamaica will rise. In addition, there will be even fewer younger persons to provide informal support for aging family members.

Among older persons, those who are 75 and older, females represented 59 percent with an estimated rise to 60 percent by 2025. Jamaican life expectancy in 1997 for males was 73 years and females 78 years. This is a higher rate than that expected in Brazil and comparable to the United States. However, Jamaica's rates are lower than Canada. Among widowed persons 60 years and older, 13 percent were male and 38 percent were female. Among those older persons who were still economically active, 23 percent were female and 49 percent were male. However, among older females 73 percent were literate compared to only 62 percent of males (PAHO, 1999). In addition, reported estimates of income support for surviving spouses were between \$10 and \$15 weekly on average (Eldemire, 1996; Rawlins, 1989). Thus, as in many countries around the world Jamaican women outlive the men, yet tend to be more economically dependent.

Research on the lifestyle of Jamaican seniors suggests that older persons live with families to which they contribute by providing support such as child care, housing, and money. Typically, family members provide financial and emotional support. In her study concerning the socioeconomic status of Jamaican elderly, Denise Eldemire (1997b) reported that 1 percent of the elderly population in Jamaica is in institutions, while only 4 percent have health insurance, and only 40 percent received any form of pension, which they reported as low. Thus, the family's financial support is necessary for older persons living on a low pension income or for those without income. However, having children did not guarantee help when they needed it, especially when an older person experienced mental impairment. Among the sample of older persons, 65.2 percent reported that they received money from family members and government assistance in the form of food

stamps. Pensions were not the major source of support. Within Eldemire's (1997b) sample of older persons, 24 percent reported that they are still employed. According to 1992 Labour force statistics, among older persons ages 65 years and older, 55.9 percent of males and 24.2 percent of females are still employed. In many ways retirement is a luxury for many older persons in Jamaica.

**Community Supports.** In Jamaica, the National Council for Senior Citizens (formerly National Council for the Aged) is a governmental body that provides income support, drug cards, and food stamps for older Jamaicans. The Council provides some funding and technical support for the development of Golden Age Clubs throughout Jamaica. The goal of the Clubs and other seniors' groups is to satisfy the spiritual, emotional, recreational, and financial needs of seniors. In 1994, there were 212 registered groups consisting of 8,963 members of which 2,006 were male and 6,957 were female. Club activities reflected the aims of strengthening seniors' capacity to meet their basic needs and to live healthy and fulfilled lives through skills development and group initiatives. These activities included skills development, arts and crafts, culinary arts, health promotion and nutrition, kitchen gardening, educational workshops, outings, and volunteer training. Members are involved in income-generating projects, feeding programs for seniors, home visits and care for shut-in seniors, and outreach projects. The Council hosts an annual Senior Citizens' Week in which Gold Age Club members participate. In addition, the National Council for Senior Citizens also sponsors Senior Day Activity Centres. In 1996, the Council reported ten such centres (National Council for Senior Citizens).

The Association of Senior Citizens Clubs is a non-governmental organization providing funding for the establishment of various income-generating projects. By 1996, this body had provided grants and loan funding to the value of \$800,000 (Jamaican dollars) in cash and equipment

to 120 clubs. Seniors' association used this funding to establish or expand income-generating projects in farming, poultry and cattle rearing, food preparation, horticulture, direct distribution ventures, manufacturing, and arts and crafts (National Council for Senior Citizens). The work of the Clubs and the Association of Senior Citizens Clubs provides seniors with social outlets, supplemental income support, and opportunities to lead active and productive lives.

In the next section, I will attempt to outline some of the historical developments of the Americas and the Caribbean to demonstrate the connection between Jamaica and the larger historical, geographic, and cultural contexts in which it exists.

**A context within contexts: Jamaica, the Caribbean, the Americas, and the African Diaspora**

**Americas.** The development of the geopolitical entity known as the Americas<sup>3</sup> began more than five hundred years ago with European exploration for trade routes and resources. During the late fifteenth century, the governments of Portugal and Spain were the original sponsors of exploration of this (Davis, 1995), which led to Christopher Columbus' "discovery" of the West Indies in 1492. Columbus named the region the West Indies for what he originally believed was a western route to India. The Americas in general share a common history of Western European imperial and commercial expansion, colonialism, the forced migration, dispersal, and enslavement of Africans and the "destruction, dispersal, and dispossession" of Aboriginal peoples (Bateman, 1995, p. 32). The development of the Americas, particularly the Caribbean and Latin America, is directly related to the evolution of the African diaspora as a consequence of mercantile expansion

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<sup>3</sup>The name America, in reference to the Western Hemisphere, first appeared in German cartographer, Martin Waldseemüller's *Introduction to Cosmography* in 1507, which was derived from Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, who claimed to be the first to reach the North American mainland (Encarta, 1996).

and slavery over the past 500 years (Alleyne, 1988; Baptiste, 1998; Davis, 1995; Kilson & Rotberg, 1976; Rodney, 1972). Raw materials in the so-called “New World” were used to satisfy the demands of markets in Europe. From lumber, fur, and wheat in the north to sugar, spices, and cotton in the south, the Americas supplied Europe’s storehouses (Baptiste, 1998). In particular, during the early sixteenth century, Portugal and Spain respectively began to subject the native peoples they found in South America and the Caribbean islands to forced labour and stripped them of their land. In some cases, entire nations of Aboriginal peoples were destroyed through contact with Europeans (Bateman, 1995). Subsequently, contacts between Europeans and Africans led to the forced dispersion of an estimated 10- 20 million Africans from their homeland to the “New World”<sup>4</sup> during the four hundred years of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Kilson & Rotberg, 1976). The economies of Europe have been built upon the raw materials and free labour of captive Africans in the Americas (Rodney, 1972). **The Caribbean.** The Caribbean in geographic terms usually includes the islands in the Caribbean Sea, from the Bahamas to Trinidad and Tobago. However, in geopolitical discussions the region includes Bermuda, “the rimlands of American Florida, Mexican Yucatan, the Isthmus of Central America, Columbia, Venezuela, and the Guyanas”(Baptiste, 1998, p. 9). However, to view the Caribbean as though it was a unified geopolitical entity ignores the region’s complex history, social, economic, and political developments and configurations that exist (Palmer, 1998). Baptiste writes:

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<sup>4</sup>Darién J. Davis discusses the role of African citizens from the Iberian peninsula as part of the parties of explorers and settlers in the Americas (1995). Davis writes, “the initial period of conquest relied upon Africans residing on the peninsula to supplement the limited number of Europeans in their effort to reduce the native population of the New World to the altered economic and political order” (Davis, 1995, p. XII). However, Spain along with their precursor Portugal initiated the African slave trade and dispersion of Africans to the Caribbean and Latin America (Alleyne, 1988; Davis, 1995).



In a historico-sociological sense, however, there is not one Caribbean but several Caribbeans, namely British / Commonwealth; Spanish / Hispanic; French; Dutch; and ex-Danish / now United States . . . Linguistically, the people of the archipelago and the rimland of the Caribbean are English- (including American English), Spanish-, French-, and Dutch-speaking mainly, with a number of so-called "Creole" dialects that reflect the interaction between these European languages and those of native Indians and incoming continental Africans and Asians from the late fifteenth century (pp. 9- 10).

The dominant mode of production within the Caribbean has historically been the plantation system in which a large proportion of transported Africans were forced into labour as slaves. The post-slavery era was marked by a labour shortage due to the freeing of Black slaves. After slavery ended, South and East Asian peoples joined the "Afro-Creole" population of indentured workers, those workers who were contracted to work for a specified time. After the specified time and having fulfilled their contractual obligations, these previously indentured workers were allowed to hire themselves out elsewhere (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997). Class distinctions arose between indentured workers and workers who were former slaves. Consequently in the Caribbean and Latin America, developed societies where the majority population comprises people of colour, particularly African or Aboriginal peoples, who occupy the lower classes and are socially, economically, and politically oppressed by a Creole middle class comprising mixed-race persons, and a European minority who occupy the upper classes (Burton, 1997; Nascimento, 1995). Thus, we can say that race and class are closely tied throughout the Caribbean (Cole, 1997). The creolization, the synthesis or evolution of new cultures, languages and religions stems from the interaction between the diverse peoples. Some theorists (Burton, 1997) use the term Creole in speaking of New World Africans, those who were born in the Americas who they claim had little or no knowledge of the former African culture. It can be said that the culture of New World Africans is a creation of their

experience of being disconnected from their homeland, language, and customs in the New World. Contrary to this view, other scholars cite the persistence and retention of African cultural identities and practices within Caribbean and Latin American cultures (Alleyne, 1988, Davis, 1995). New World or Afro-Creoles were not accorded the same privileges as the "mixed-raced" Creoles.

Historical, social, political and economic developments in the Caribbean and Latin America followed a pattern that reflected linguistic subdivisions within the region. For example, in Latin America, the Roman Catholic Church played a pivotal role in Portugal and Spain's colonization efforts by using religion to assimilate native peoples. The development of a Creole ruling class (consisting of persons with mixed Spanish and Aboriginal ancestry) and the presence of the Hispanic Catholic church were responsible for most of the Spanish-American colonies' renouncement of allegiance to Spain as early as 1825, with the exceptions of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Thus, the social structure within Latin America reflected the roles of the Roman Catholic Church and the Creole ruling classes that emerged throughout the historical development of the region. Marxist, communist, and socialist rebellions and dictatorships, and liberation theology punctuate Latin American history. All of the previously mentioned factors and others, therefore, contributed to the distinctness of Latin America (Davis, 1995; Payne, 1988; Robinson, 1996).

Similarly, the English-speaking Caribbean shares some common historical legacies unique to the British colonization of the Caribbean. The British imposed upon their colonies their forms of government, judiciary, education system, and member status within the British commonwealth. Within the colonies emerged complex class-based societies based upon subtleties in colour. Other commonalities within the English-speaking Caribbean include, the influence of Protestantism, the stride and press toward independence from Britain, and the development of their individual nation

status and identity in the face of neocolonialist pressures from the United States (Baptiste, 1998; Davis, 1995; Palmer 1998). Similar developments took place in the history of Jamaica. For example, the Spanish 1509 colonized Jamaica and subsequently by the British in 1670 who forced aboriginal Arawak, Carib and African peoples respectively into slave labour on plantations. The Taino, an Arawak people were absorbed into the African population, while the Carib were annihilated through warfare and disease (Carey, 1997). Jamaica endured three-hundred years of the British rule in the form of government, judiciary, and education systems fashioned in London, accompanied by waves of Protestant missions both from Europe and the United States. Similar to other Caribbean countries, Jamaica's culture has evolved out of synthesis of African, Aboriginal, and European culture, languages and religion, and occupies a position as a third world nation within the current global economy.

**Jamaica.** Jamaica developed its unique identity due to the presence of an African majority, who retained their core community and spiritual values in the face of oppression within the development of Jamaica's nationhood. The history of Jamaica reflects the history of African resistance to economic, social, racial, and religious oppression. From the Spanish occupation of Jamaica from 1507 to 1655, through the war between Britain and the Maroons<sup>5</sup> from 1660 to 1738, through the British occupation from 1670 to 1962, and the various African resistance movements of which the Morant Bay Uprising of 1865, and the emergence of Rastafarianism during the early

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<sup>5</sup>See Bev Carey's comprehensive work, *The Maroon Story* (1997), which chronicle the development of this distinct group within Jamaica and their presence throughout the Americas from Brazil to Nova Scotia. Maroon culture is a combination of the original Arawak and West African cultures, with more emphasis on the African component. The existence of Maroon cultures throughout the African diaspora are a testament to African resistance against domination.

1930's; resistance and opposition have punctuated the landscape of Jamaican history (Burton, 1997). Resistance led to the abolition of slavery in Jamaica, August 1, 1838 (Burton, 1997). However, the identification with Africa as the ancestral homeland and the awareness of the common plight of the Black majority in Jamaica also contributed to resistance movements within Jamaica. This same resistance led toward the conception, incubation, and birth of two distinct groups within Jamaica, namely the Maroons and the Rastafarians who in turn have come to represent resistance within Jamaican society (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997; Davis, 1995). Both groups identify culturally with Africa and have sought to maintain, or as in the case of Rastafarianism, recapture African cultural practices and ways of knowing. However, the Maroons waged armed resistance against British sovereignty and slavery, and fought for the right to self-governance during colonial and post-colonial periods in Jamaican history. Meanwhile, the Rastafarian resistance is characterized by resistance against neocolonialism and capitalism as represented in communal lifestyle, diet, dress, language, music and art (Barrett, 1995). Together, both groups represent resistance to Eurocentric cultural, economic, social, and political domination and oppression (Burton, 1997; Carey, 1997).

The African value for the collective, one's community or kinship, facilitated the unification necessary for resistance movements in Jamaica. Again, we can observe the value for the collective within Rastafarian and Maroon communities whose members consciously refer to Africa as the homeland and who place a high emphasis on community, the collective, and on working toward the common good. Again these two groups, although subgroups within Jamaican society, are indicative of an African consciousness embedded (but not always expressed or acknowledged) within Jamaican culture and echoed throughout the diaspora (Asante, 1990; Davis, 1995). A part of this African consciousness is a collectivist orientation (Alleyne, 1988; Asante, 1990; Ayittey, 1991).

Collectivism refers to responsibility for and to one's group, community, or kinship, whereas individualism refers to responsibility to and for oneself or immediate family (Jagers & Mock, 1995). Within Jamaican society there exists a dialectic between American influenced individualism and Jamaican collectivism. It is the threat of individualism, however, that also places the position of older persons at risk, yet necessitates their collective work.

Historically, Jamaica was and in many ways still is an agrarian society (Payne, 1988). Most of the people living in rural areas are poor subsistence farmers along with a number of middle class commercial farmers (Barrett, 1995). Most of the farm land belongs to a few wealthy large-scale planters (DeHaney, 1987). Foreign owned (mostly United States owned) hotels and resorts account for another sizeable proportion of land holdings (Baptiste, 1998). During slavery, the majority of Black persons were owned and laboured for free on large sugar and coffee plantations owned by White planters (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997) and built wealth for Britain. In the twentieth-century, bauxite mining became the other chief export from Jamaica, bringing with it some prosperity to the local economy, but, not for the majority of Jamaicans (Payne, 1988). However, fluctuating world prices for bauxite have made it a less stable source of revenue in the past twenty years. Similarly, the produce industry has suffered. Tourism now stands as Jamaica's primary industry (Mandle, 1998). Just as many other developing nations that were historically dependent on foreign markets for revenue, Jamaica has suffered heavily due to fickle global markets. With increased unemployment, increased inflation, and the increased cost of living, the majority of Jamaicans live in poverty. In addition, increased urbanization has meant the shift from a rural peasantry to a class of urban squatters. The intrusion of United States' popular culture into Jamaica via mass media is partly to blame for the increased demand for foreign goods over locally produced goods (Baptiste,

1998; Payne, 1988). During the nineteen-seventies, the socialist political era of former Prime Minister Michael Manley, Jamaica and Cuba collaborated on a number of joint infrastructure projects and the building of Cuban-sponsored schools in Jamaica (Payne, 1988). During this time, Jamaica saw the departure of many middle and upper merchant class families, primarily comprising Syrian, Chinese and White Jamaicans, fearing a threat of communism to their positions of privilege. In their flight, they took with them their wealth that supposedly had adverse effects on the country's economy (Payne, 1988).

United States-based conservatism and neocolonialism infiltrated Jamaican politics and economics during the 1980's in which Edward Seaga was Prime Minister. Foreign investments in Jamaica increased. Meanwhile, the Jamaican dollar value dropped lower. Although there is increased investment in the economy, unemployment remains quite high and contributes to crime particularly among youth. Improving access to education and health care and providing greater resources for children, youth, and the elderly are concerns important to Jamaicans at home and abroad. Nevertheless, decreasing foreign debt and crime have been two of the government's major concerns in more recent years (Stone, 1989; Palmer, 1998).

**The African Diaspora.** George Shepperson (1976) in his introduction to Kilson and Rotberg's The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays used the term diaspora in reference to Africans outside Africa in such places as Europe and the Americas. The diaspora developed largely due to forced migration during the period of European imposed slavery. Shepperson claimed that the term became popular in the 1960's, but the concept of a global community of African peoples outside Africa was preceded by Edward W. Blyden during the 19th century. In terms of demographics, the majority population in Jamaica, 92 percent, comprises people of African descent (Alleyne, 1988;

Payne, 1988). This fact is relevant to discussing Jamaican culture in the context of the African diaspora. Jamaica was one of the destinations and transfer points for the dispersal of Africans throughout the Americas during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, and as such is a part of the African diaspora. The African Diaspora refers to the dispersal of Africans outside the African continent (Kilson & Rotberg, 1976). African American is the term used in reference to diasporic Africans in the Western Hemisphere (Alleyne, 1988). As part of the African diasporic and African American cultural contexts, Jamaican culture reflects the process of continuity and synthesis of African cultures (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997; Davis, 1995). However, due to the presence of other cultures and the dominance of the British, Jamaican culture is also a synthesis of diverse cultural elements. In her discussion about creolization, Adderley (1996) stated:

Diaspora Africans and their descendants simultaneously and over long periods negotiated a dialectical experience of both remaining African and becoming African-American (p. 254).

Similarly, Jamaican cultural identity contains this dialectic as best exemplified in the Maroon communities who have maintained their identification with Africa, yet are distinctly Jamaican. In the words of the late Jamaican reggae musician Peter Tosh, "No matta where yuh come from, yuh are an African." As Jamaican culture has been influenced by African cultures (Alleyne, 1988), it is relevant to link the experiences of community of older Jamaicans to the value for the collective found throughout the African diaspora (Ayittey, 1991; Jacobson-Widding & Van Beek, 1990).

In the preceding sections, I presented a contextual framework for viewing the community experiences of older persons in Jamaica. The world's population is aging, and so is Jamaica's population. There are challenges that Jamaican seniors presently face that come out of the historical

context of colonization and its accompanying phenomena. However, the resources and strategies available to Jamaican seniors can be attributed to cultural legacies tied to the presence of an African majority. The historical development of the Americas, particularly the English-speaking Caribbean, parallels the development of Jamaica. Parallels in the development of the Jamaican cultural identity are echoed throughout the African diaspora. Thus, I hope to identify where culture has informed the community participation among a few older Jamaicans. In the following section, I present a brief description of the major perspectives in aging research.

### **Aging as a social process**

As we age, mental, physical, social, and spiritual changes occur. From a holistic point of view physical, social, economic, political, environmental and social factors impact upon the aging process. Aging has been viewed from a myriad of perspectives, however, a traditional and common focus has been on the losses and deficits incurred, and particularly physical problems encountered, as a result of growing older (Myers, 1996). Cowdry (Schaie & Willis, 1991), a forerunner in the field of biological gerontology, proposed that aging is either an endogenous or exogenous process. As an endogenous process, aging occurs involuntarily where cells endure adverse changes over the passage of time. As an exogenous process, aging is the result of impairments due to infections, accidents, and toxins in the external environment. Another theorist, Handler (ibid.) proposed that aging is the inevitable deterioration of a mature organism due to decreased ability to cope with environmental stresses eventually leading to death. Both theorists focused on losses that occur over time whether the changes are due to external or internal factors.

Illness and disease are biological factors that can determine the length of one's life. Similarly, as we age, psychological changes occur such as changes in our personality, memory, or



creativity that may affect the way we think and behave (Gatz, Bengston, & Blum, 1990). Some psychological changes that occur may be due to our individual physical processes, such as illness or injury, and factors in our social environment, such as cultural values, particularly regarding aging processes (McPherson, 1998). In other words, our view of ourselves as we age may also be determined by the values held toward aging and older persons within a given social context, society, or culture.

If we presume that deficits in functioning are inevitable, then preparing for these losses would entail making adjustments in our lifestyles. "Activity theory was the first theory that sought to explain successful or ideal aging in the later years of life" (McPherson, 1998, 78). In 1953, Havighurst and Albrecht proposed that maintaining the activities of middle-age into old age were optimal for successful aging (Hooyman & Asuman Kiyak, 1991). Other activity theorists suggest that as we age and our roles change, we should assume roles and activities in order to maintain our self-concept and sense of well-being (McPherson, 1998).

Disengagement emerged as a prominent theory with the work of Cumming and Henry (1961) in the field of social gerontology, who offered it as a model for successful aging (Hooyman & Asuman Kiyak, 1991; McPherson, 1998; Schaie & Willis, 1991). Withdrawal from work, social, and community activities was assumed to be beneficial for society and for older people who it was assumed, universally experience inevitable physical and mental deterioration. Since death was inevitable, it was less disruptive for society that individuals ease out of the roles in society as the age (McPherson, 1998). Disengagement was perceived to be a normal process. This theory has been criticised as not accounting for disengagement that occurs across the life pan, in a variety of settings,

nor does it account for how we continue to be physically engaged, yet mentally disengaged from our various tasks and roles.

Continuity theory offers a more positive view of aging in that proponents argue that as we age we attempt to maintain or “continue” our lifestyle. Successful aging is achieved through the continuity of our lifestyle from earlier years. Our social environment supports the maintenance of our way of life, roles, relationships, and activities. A criticism of this theory is that it ignored the influence of changes in the social environment, such as changes in societal and “cultural values, modernization, and acculturation by immigrants” (McPherson, 1998, p. 81). McPherson wrote:

Continuity does not imply an absence of change. Rather, maintaining continuity involves adapting to both internal (attitudes, values, beliefs, temperament, identity) (p.81)

Earlier in this thesis, I provided some demographic statistics to provide a picture of the aging process from in terms of the population distribution of older persons in the Americas, the Caribbean and Jamaica. I then went on to describe some social, economic, and political aspects that affect the lives of Jamaican seniors. Much of what we know about aging overall emanates from the field of gerontology. The multi-disciplinary field of gerontology is defined as “the study of the phenomena of the aging process from maturity into old age, as well as the study of the elderly as a special population” (Schaie & Willis, 1991, p. 10). As aging involves various changes, the disciplines that inform the field reflect a variety of perspectives. In this thesis, I focus on social, psychological, and spiritual aspects of aging. For example, I explore the roles that culture, religion, and the individual’s life experiences play in shaping their experiences in the community. Although, much what we know about aging reflects a biological perspective, I will present a brief overview of some developments

in social aging below. Social aging is relevant from a community psychologist's point of view because much of our work focuses on the social and relational aspects of living.

In his text Aging as a Social Process: An Introduction to Individual and Population Aging, Barry D. McPherson (1998) stated:

We do not age in a social vacuum. Thus, we must study the variations or changes in social structures and in cultural and social institutions that may influence both individual and population aging. In addition, we must analyse how earlier life events influence social, cognitive, and physical adaptation to events and conditions in later life (p.10).

McPherson goes on to state that individual and environmental factors or determinants influence individual and population aging, such as:

Biological, sociological, and psychological factors unique to an individual or age cohort; the social structures within a society; social, economic, political, and technological change within a society; and the historical events experienced at a particular age or stage in life (p.10).

As part of my analysis in exploring social aging processes, I consider social structures such as colonialism, racism, and classism that are a part of Jamaica's past and present (Alleyne, 1988; Bailey, 1997; Cole, 1997) and their impact on the lives of the individuals in this thesis. My social location as a Black Jamaican-Canadian woman informs this analysis, particularly, as racism and classism are a part of my experience, as they are a part of the Black Jamaicans I interviewed. Similarly, economic structures such as capitalism and globalization, in addition to political structures, such as colonialism, imperialism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, neocolonialism

(Barrow, 1997; Baptiste, 1998; Edie, 1991) have all played a part in shaping the evolving economic and political structures in Jamaica; and hence, influence to a certain degree the challenges and opportunities that affect the lives of the seniors in this study.

Another aspect of social aging is the cultural context. Culture plays an important role in aging processes from the influence of the foods we eat on our bodies to the types of activities we engage as older persons (Jackson, Antonucci & Gibson, 1990). "Our culture, and the period of history we pass through, influence how we age and the extent to which we are valued in our later years" (McPherson, 1998, p. 31). Culture and society are closely related in that society consists of "sets of relationships," while culture describes the meanings of these relationships. Many societies throughout the world have cultural values that reflect the high social status of older persons. For example, cultures as diverse as the Ashante (Yansane, 1990), Samoans, and the Anicinabe of Georgian Bay in Canada (McPherson, 1998), highly valued older persons, and their elders held special roles within their communities and kinships. In this thesis, I also look at the role of culture in the community participation of a few elders in Jamaica.

As stated earlier, activity is linked to successful aging. Social support, and participation in community life are related to older persons' well-being and the enrichment of the lives of those around them (Coke & Twaite, 1995; Wolff, 1987). Expanding on this theme, other researchers have documented the process of empowerment in the lives of older persons who are engaged in community activism (Abrahams, 1996; Kuhn, 1991; Lightfoot, 1983). Older persons can experience empowerment when they live in social and environments that promote active living and social participation.

Participation in community endeavours particularly in group activities requiring decision making may be the key to empowerment (Lord & Farlow, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Participation and empowerment are phenomena of interest for community psychologists. In particular, community psychologists study these phenomena in a variety of settings and with a variety of populations (Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Lord & Hutchison, 1993). The next section includes a discussion on the location of older persons' experiences within community psychology.

### **The Location of Older Persons' Experiences within Community Psychology**

The definition of community psychology is a work in progress. As such, that community psychology is an emerging field and is still in the process of being defined (Newbrough, 1992). The field is defined by the values espoused, the practices and methodologies, and levels of analysis that are promoted and utilized. For examples, theorists embrace values such as empowerment, distributive justice, diversity, self-determination, health and collaborative and democratic participation (Prilleltensky, 1997; Rappaport, 1994; Trickett, Watts, & Birman, 1994). Community researchers encourage ecological approaches that integrate micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis to provide a more in-depth assessment of people in settings in order to derive relevant and comprehensive interventions (Kelly, 1986). Through the application of participatory methods, participants are engaged in research and planning interventions that can be empowering for those involved. Thus, the role of the psychologist is transformed from that of an expert into that of a collaborator, facilitator, or change agent, while, the role of the "subject" is transformed into that of a participant or collaborator. Power imbalances within the research can be minimized through using language that promotes the values of social justice (Walsh, 1987).

Community psychology has emerged out of recognition that our social nature dictates that when we are having troubles we must look to our social landscape for answers (Sarason as cited in Bennett, 1987). As such, the primary goal of community psychology is social change. The prevention of psychological and social problems are of primary concerns within the field (Albee et al., 1988; Pancer & Cameron, 1994). What separates community psychology from mainstream psychology is the focus on groups and communities as units of analysis as opposed to a focus on individuals. The community is seen as a mechanism for healing much in the same way that community or collective approaches are used for healing by African and First Nations communities for example (Gregory, 1989; Jacobson-Widding & Westerlund, 1989).

In terms of social change, community psychologists are usually engaged in first order change, the type that occurs within a system, structure, or institution (Bennett, 1987). Research and interventions are set within mental health (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Nelson & Walsh-Bowers, 1994), education (Trickett & Birman, 1989), and program evaluation (Nelson & Hayday, 1995; Pancer, 1996). Second-order change, refers to change that is external to a system, structure or institution, is macro level change aimed at changing society and the structures within it. Examples of second-order change include the Nestle Boycott that addressed the issues of the multinational company interference in infant nutrition and changing feeding practices in developing nations and other social movements (Bennett, 1987). As advocates, community psychologists have acted to defend the rights of communities to self-determination, as well as in transforming the role of research in community change.

While the primary target populations within community psychology research may include adults of various ages, children, and youth, the older population is neglected within community

psychology. The community experiences of older persons, particularly in the third world, are rarely the focus of community psychology research and interventions. This is true particularly about older Caribbean persons. As a whole the body of work on the experiences of Caribbean people within community psychology is limited, although the field espouses the value of human diversity (Trickett et al., 1994). To date, community psychology studies on the community experiences of Caribbean peoples have been centrally located within the experiences of Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin American peoples (Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 1990; Serrano-Garcia, 1984, 1994), particularly among non-elderly populations. English-speaking Caribbean peoples share common experiences of colonization with Spanish, Dutch, and French Caribbean peoples. However, just as there are cultural variations among the colonizers, these variations exist among the colonized and are reflected in the diverse political, economic, and social configurations that exist throughout the Caribbean region (Anderson, 1993; Davis, 1995). Therefore, the unique positionalities to be encountered within a single English-speaking Caribbean context, such as Jamaica, is in of itself a valid focus for study, and is important in the representation of diverse Caribbean voices within community psychology.

Much of the research that exists regarding the experiences of older English-speaking Caribbean persons has emanated from fields such as sociology, economics, history, medicine, psychiatry, health promotion, and social work (Brathwaite, 1989; DeHaney, 1987; Eldemire, 1987; 1997; Grell, 1980; Lennon, Clarke, & Alleyne, 1980; Mesfin, Sinha, Jusum, Simmon, & Eldemire,

1989; Rawlins, 1989).<sup>6</sup> The focus of this body of research has been on informing economic, social and particularly health policy benefitting older persons. In 1989, Caribbean sociologist, Farley Brathwaite, stated, "Academic research on the socioeconomic conditions of elderly people in the region [Caribbean] is underdeveloped" (p. 299). In more recent years, however, there has been a greater interest in the socioeconomic conditions of older persons in the Caribbean generally and Jamaica specifically, and how this may affect the quality of their lives (Eldemire, 1997b; PAHO, 1999).

The present study of older persons living in Jamaica expands the cultural and age-specific perspectives represented within the field of community psychology. In particular, I focus on the experiences and definitions of community, participation, and empowerment among older persons in Jamaica. In order to proceed with this study, I needed to have a framework from which to operate. Thus, I used the definitions emanating from community psychology for working definitions of community, participation and empowerment, which I present in the subsequent section.

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<sup>6</sup> Socioeconomic status, medical manifestations, and family support have been the primary focus of research with older persons in the Caribbean. Jamaican epidemiologist at Department of Community Health and Psychiatry, University of the West Indies, Denise Eldemire, has written extensively on health and related issues pertaining to Jamaican seniors (1987, 1994, 1997a). Farley Brathwaite has edited a comprehensive text entitled The Elderly in Barbados which explores psycho social development, socioeconomic, and social policy (1986). G. Grell's edited text entitled The Elderly in the Caribbean focuses on medical matters (1987). Joan M. Rawlin's scholarship on "Widowhood in Jamaica" documents coping strategies utilized by widowed women (1989). Her sample was not limited, however, to senior aged widows although they constituted the majority of those women interviewed. William T. DeHaney's (1987) discusses the social and economic of rural elderly in Jamaica in "Romanticizing the status of the rural elderly: Theory and policy implications."



## **Definitions of Community, Participation, and Empowerment**

**Community.** Fundamental to any discourse on community participation is the definition of community itself. Community can be defined as a process of communion (Riger, 1993), a collective of agreed-upon perspectives and shared experience, or a psychological sense of connectedness (Abrahams, 1996). Psychologist Seymour Sarason (1974) emphasized mutual aid and benefit in defining the psychological sense of community. It can be said that community is a psychological construct in that people think about the network or group of people with whom they are connected as their community. There is a sense of belonging or “we feeling” in community. In Jamaican vernacular, it is the sense of belonging and ownership (not in a capitalist sense) evoked by the phrase “a fi-wi” or “is ours.” Yet, many people often define community in terms of their neighbourhood when they are asked questions as to which community do they belong or to define their community.<sup>7</sup> So, it seems that community may be understood as a geographic, physical, psychological, or sociological entity depending on one’s social location and disciplinary perspective. For some individuals, community may be a combination of these things. For the purpose of this thesis, community is defined as the geographic or social body to which a person belongs and to which a person feels a sense of belonging.

**Participation.** Participation in groups may be an empowering process or outcome for group members. Participation may stem from or lead to feelings of community and connectedness (Abrahams, 1996). Zimmerman and Rappaport (1988) defined participation as “involvement in any organized activity in which the individual participates without pay in order to achieve a common

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<sup>7</sup>In collecting data for three community research projects, participants often referred to their community as their residential neighbourhood (Russell, 1996; Ojo & Russell, 1998; Youth Connection Association, 1994)

goal.” Abrahams (1996) in her study of women’s community participation included benevolent service, social action, and unpaid community involvement and empowerment, among other terms as community participation. In the present study, I define community participation as voluntary individual involvement in collective action for the purpose of an outcome that benefits the collective whether the nature of the collective and activities are political, social, economic, cultural, or religious.

**Empowerment.** Empowerment has been described as a “multilevel” construct involving macro and micro level social, political, economic, and historic processes and outcomes, and can be examined within individual, small group, or societal units of analysis (Clark, 1989; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Community psychologist Julian Rappaport (1987) defined empowerment as “a process, a mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs” (p. 122) In more detail, empowerment is:

Applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighbourhoods; it suggests the study of people in context . . . The concept suggests both individual determination over one’s own life and democratic participation in the life of one’s community, often through the mediating structures of society, which include the family, the school, the neighbourhood, the church, and voluntary associations, as well as self and mutual help groups and organizations. (Rappaport, 1994, p. 366)

Similarly, communities that are empowered are those that which recognize their capacities and exercise use of them to meet challenges of individuals who are a part of them (Albee et. al, 1988).

Feminist scholar, Janet L. Surrey (1991) defined empowerment as:

the motivational freedom and capacity to act purposefully with the mobilization of the energies, resources, strengths, or powers of each person through a mutual, relational process. Personal empowerment can be viewed only through the larger lens of power through connection, that is through the establishment of mutually empathetic and mutually empowering relationships (p. 164).

Surrey's definition contains an assumption that power resides within individuals. The activation of this power or capacity, however, takes place through a collective, through relationships. Surrey's definition is the premise for what feminist psychologist Stephanie Riger (1993) referred to as the "feminine concerns for communion and cooperation." The definition of empowerment used for this study is an integration of Surrey's (1991), Riger's (1993), Rappaport's (1987) and Albee's (1988) perspectives. Thus for the purpose of this study, empowerment is defined as the process and outcome of communion and cooperation of individuals in communities where they recognize their collective strengths, take action, effect change, and enhance or gain a sense of their efficacy. Within this definition, empowerment does not come from without, but occurs within the context of relationships, and built upon the collective capacities of the community. The operative terms in this concept of empowerment are recognition and action. The community and individuals are empowered because they recognized that they have strengths and use these to their benefit. In the next section, I provide a statement of the study's purpose.

### **The Purpose for this Study:**

In this research, I examine the role of culture in the community involvement of some older persons living in Jamaica. Certainly, the values found within a particular culture will influence to some extent individuals' views of themselves and their relationships, of which community is a part. For example, persons living within a culture or society that holds a premium value for individuals may view their community involvements as being more about their own self-fulfilment as opposed to what is for the common good. On the other hand, persons living within cultural contexts that value the collective may view their community involvements in terms of the benefit it brings to the collective or for the common good. Individualism refers to motivations, relationships and actions

in which the focus is on self and one's immediate family. Collectivism, on the other hand, is characterized by motivations, relationships, and actions where the focus is on connection, cohesion and focus on the group, family, kinship, and community (Hofstede in Kim, Triandis, Kâğıtçıbaşı, Choi, Yoon, 1994). This is of particular relevancy to community psychologists who value cultural diversity, as understanding the individual and collective orientation of both the individual participants and their cultural context is helpful in describing and analysing community processes. Ignoring the values of a particular culture, society, or community, yet proceeding to analyse community processes, decontextualizes community experiences. However, by examining cultural contexts we may discover the cultural values related to individual and community phenomena.

I hope to amplify the voices of a few older people living in Jamaica, for whom community is essential and participation is a way of life, and to propose a perspective on aging that reflect the realities and possibilities that are indicative of context and culture. In examining the lives of elders in Jamaica, I make reference to the roles of older persons within the cultural context of Jamaica, the Caribbean, the Third World, the Americas and throughout the African Diaspora. I discuss the values for the collective and for older persons echoed throughout the diaspora and Africa. Community participation in the form of Jamaican seniors' activism and advocacy in the development of seniors resources have yet to be studied within a community psychology framework.

Activism can be described as informal or formal advocacy, lobbying, consciousness raising, or mobilization on behalf of or with an individual or community around an issue or cause. Activism is a means by which to attain empowerment (Abrahams, 1996). Advocacy in this study is defined as work done on behalf of someone else or one's own community. In the course of conducting this research I chart a few developments within the area of community participation and activism with

older persons in Jamaica and to derive their meanings for community participation, activism and growing old. Including the experiences of Jamaican seniors within community psychology advances the cause of diversity within the field, and therefore expand its borders.

To fulfill the purposes of the study, I explored the meanings attached to growing old, community participation, activism, and empowerment in community settings for a few older adults in Jamaica. In addition, I examined some of the cultural and religious aspects of individual community involvements. Hopefully, the reader will gain insights into the processes and outcomes of community participation and empowerment and what they mean to these individuals, as well as implications these phenomena may have for older persons in Jamaica. To achieve this task, I ask the following general questions throughout this study:

- What are the experiences of community, participation, and empowerment for some older individuals living in Jamaica (process and outcomes of connection, active involvement, and efficacy)?
- How do these seniors define their involvement in the community (roles, self-definitions, expectations)?
- How do these individuals define themselves in terms of their age?
- Do they see themselves as old; if not, who is old?
- Is age a factor in the community involvement (s) of the older individuals in this study?
- Is activism a relevant term in describing the type of community participation engaged in by the individuals in this study?
- What are some common elements to be found among the interview participants in terms of their community participation and empowerment?

- **What can community psychology learn about the relevance of cultural contexts to community participation, empowerment, activism, and aging from Jamaican seniors?**

**In the following methods and findings sections, I will explain the approach I took in order to reflect the cultural and religious perspectives of the participants in this study. The subsequent discussion will entail the synthesis of the findings in light of scholarship across the social sciences and humanities with regard to older persons living in Jamaica and their community experiences. Finally, I will suggest ways in which the community experiences of older persons living in Jamaica may inform the theory and practice of community psychology.**

## **Methodology**

### **A Culturally Relevant Paradigm**

In conducting any inquiry there has to be a framework within which to observe so-called reality. In this study, I examine the social, political, cultural, and economic factors influencing the historical reality of older Jamaicans live. I attempt to use this knowledge as the basis for transforming traditional views of aging and to propose how we may better serve the interests of older persons. A paradigm is a set of basic beliefs or principles about the "nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts." (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 200) My paradigm reflects a culturally relevant point of view from which to examine the lived experiences of the participants' lives as Jamaican seniors. The ontology of my study asks "what is the nature of reality?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 201) The nature of this study is subjective in that the findings do not represent an objective view of participants' reality, but reflects my subjective interpretation of their reality based upon what I heard them say and what I observed. The epistemology of my study asks "what is the relationship between the knower and what is known?" As the knower, what I learn about the experiences of the older people in this study is influenced by my social location as an African-Canadian acculturated, Jamaican woman with older Jamaican parents. Lastly, my methodology asks "by what means do we know what is known?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 185) The nature of the methodology used within this study is dialogical / dialectical, as it attempts to challenge traditionally held views of and methods for studying the aging process and provides for a reexamination of what that process is within a specific ethno cultural, social, political, and economic context. In addition, the methods I used are culturally relevant to the specific cultural context in question.

The specificity of culture was an important factor in this research, requiring a paradigm that reflected the world view and ways of knowing of the older Jamaicans that I interviewed. Yet, even well intentioned researchers often impose a world view that is foreign to the people with whom they conduct research. Western research approaches based upon Eurocentric paradigms, epistemology, and ontology impose a foreign and subjective world view that distorts the picture of people of colour. The result of the European hegemony in knowledge production is that people of colour, Third World people, of which Jamaicans and other Caribbean peoples are a part, have been portrayed as deviant and pathological in reference to a Western European mainstream perspective (Stanfield, 1998). Thus, people of colour have become creations of imagination in the minds and publications of Western-trained scholars. As I am being trained within a North American university by Western scholars, I must qualify the title Western-trained scholars by adding to it, those individuals who are uncritical of the paradigms traditionally operating within mainstream research, and who will not acknowledge the political hegemony which exists within knowledge production (Hooks, 1989; Prilleltensky, 1994; Sherif, 1992). Stanfield (1998) in his chapter, "Ethnic modelling in qualitative research" stated:

When it comes to qualitative research as an academic enterprise cutting across disciplines, the sociocultural and political hegemony of Eurocentric interests and ontology is quite obvious . . . Considering the central presence of racialized ethnic diversity in education, the absence of an emerging body of methodological literature that attempts to de-Europeanize approaches to issues concerning people of color through the introduction of more indigenous approaches is, to say the least, curious. When we grasp the political history of the ethnic hegemony of American and comparable social science communities, it becomes apparent why there continues to be an absence of diverse racialized ethnic approaches in qualitative and quantitative research perspectives in the mainstreams of such disciplines (pp. 338-339).



Carol B. Duncan (1997) indicated the necessity of using indigenous methods in order to counter the tradition of framing African-Caribbean people's experiences within a Eurocentric frame by stating:

I sought theories and research methods which would be authentic to the Spiritual Baptist Church and the lives of immigrant, working-class [B]lack Caribbean women in order to undercut the objectifying practices that Eurocentric discussion of African-Caribbean religion uses (p. 33).

Similarly, I wanted to avoid framing the current study within a paradigm which would further reflect the dominant Western Eurocentric world view, particularly as it relates to people of colour. As an African-Canadian Jamaican woman doing this research, I felt it was my responsibility to present a view of the elders in this study using research methods grounded in Jamaican elders' experiences, reflecting a Jamaican ontology and epistemology, and that is relevant and indigenous to Jamaica. In her study of the lives African-Caribbean women who were members of the Spiritual Baptists Church, Carol B. Duncan (1997) used their songs, prayers, sermons, and testimonies as data gathering tools. Duncan's methods constitute indigenous approaches reflecting the Spiritualist Baptist Church philosophy and epistemology. More important, Duncan's methods were grounded in the world view of the Black-Caribbean women who participated in her study. This is what Stanfield speaks of when he discusses developing "ethnic models of qualitative research" by creating "novel indigenous paradigms grounded distinctly in the experiences of people of color." Such an epistemology reflects the differential values accorded to spirituality and conception of time found in African-derived religions and cultures, such as the syncretic Spiritual Baptist Church and Jamaican culture.

Various African-American female authors have used methods grounded in the experiences of African American people, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Paula

Giddings to examine the life experiences of African American women (Stanfield, 1998). Paule Giddings, Honor Ford Smith, Elsa Leo-Rhynie, Barbara Bailey, Bev Carey, Christine Burrow and Carol B. Duncan are Caribbean female authors who contributed to presenting analyses in viewing the lives of Caribbean women. Honor Ford Smith in the Introduction to Sistren's<sup>8</sup> Lionheart Gal: Life stories of Jamaican Women stated:

*Lionheart Gal* draws on a legacy of tale-telling which has always preserved the history of Caribbean women. Stories of Ni<sup>9</sup>, for example, are some of the earliest to emerge in the region after the experience of colonisation and the forced African migration. As such, they form a kind of bedrock of consciousness of female resistance among Jamaicans.

Honor Ford Smith in her work with Jamaican women used a story-telling technique to do consciousness raising and empowerment work. Bev Carey (1997) used oral history in her account of the Maroons between 1490 and 1880. Ken Tout (1989) reported that oral history was used for two projects in Jamaica. The Jamaica Memory Bank project involved volunteers as interviewers with older persons in recording:

Facts, knowledge, and even subjective impressions retained in the memories of people who were either participants in historical events or were sufficiently close to form an impression, or who inherited knowledge from previous generations (p. 199).

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<sup>8</sup>Sistren is an independent women's collective devoted to consciousness raising regarding issues affecting Caribbean women. Sistren's methods include popular theatre, workshops, silk screen art and a quarterly magazine to engage audiences in analyses of their collective situation and problem solving (Sistren, 1987).

<sup>9</sup>Ni is another name for Nanny the female Maroon leader who led the Maroon resistance against British rule and slavery in the eighteenth century. Nanny is referred to as the "incomparable tactician of the age" (Carey, 1997, p.197) She is dubbed the warrior priestess of Jamaican folklore in that she was said to have used her "powers" to stop the British.

In 1983, in conducting the Village History Project, pupils from 39 rural primary schools interviewed older persons in their villages to compile local histories. Story-telling, poetry, songs, performing arts, and proverbs are qualitative methods derived from cultures where what is spoken has more relevance over what is written and are considered indigenous methods (Stanfield, 1998).

Joseph A. Maxwell (1996) supported the use of qualitative research methods for studies exploring the specificities of cultural context and meanings. Understanding meaning, understanding a particular context, identifying unanticipated phenomena, understanding the processes by which actions take place, and developing causal explanations "are five particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially suited" (p.17) according to Maxwell (ibid.). I deal with some host specifics, being old, in Jamaica, and participating in community life. It was important for me to develop a picture of the context of older persons' lives and the processes for their involvements in the community, using their words and language. As well, it was important for me to explore the cultural legacies operating to motivate or inspire older persons' community participation.

MacLeod (1994) recommended the use of qualitative research methods when working with older persons. Seniors' auditory and visual sensory changes, slower pace for responding to questionnaires for some seniors, and a decreased willingness to participate in surveys with increased age, make quantitative methods less suitable for research with an older population (MacLeod, 1994). In addition, oral methods of data collection such as interviews allow time for participants' reflections and avoid having older persons face unfamiliar paper work which can lead to confusion and frustration (MacLeod, 1994). In addition, Shulamit Reinharz (1992) suggested interviewing for generating theory. Interviewing allows for the inclusion of nonverbal cues, such as laughter, and is responsive to a variety of settings. Furthermore, interviewing is based upon oral expression, which

is a culturally relevant method for peoples for whom conversation and story-telling is a central method of conveying experience. Story-telling is a Jamaican art form and therefore, a culturally appropriate information gathering techniques (Dance, 1980; Smith, 1987). Interviewing, story-telling, testifying and other qualitative methods are data gathering tools that allow people to express their ideas and the meaning of their actions and everyday reality -- in their own words and in their own voice.

### **The Research Context:**

In this research, I spoke with older persons who told me stories about their lives. I used oral life-story interviews to explore these social and cultural phenomena. Through the elders' personal life-histories, I obtained demographic information and personal milestones. The process of telling the story then precipitated the emergence of the unanticipated phenomenon, the phenomenon of testifying. In testifying, the teller or speaker affirms their experience by conveying it to another. In other words, testifying allows the individual to share their life experience with the listener for the purpose of instructing them on life's ways and attesting to the power that sustains them. The testimony contains an account of the persons life and their interpretation of their actions. Testifying in a Christian context is a means of sharing and affirming with others the milestones and empowerment experienced along one's spiritual journey. Within the context of conducting life-story interviews with individuals whom identified themselves as Christians, testimony is a relevant term to use. Thus, in this study with older Christian Jamaicans, testimony is the specific story-telling method that emerged. Our conversations in which individuals told me about their experiences in the community, the roles they played and what they felt in relation to these experiences took on the "call and response" characteristic of services in many Black churches (Stanfield, 1998). For example,

I acknowledged their statements by encouraging the telling and by affirming what I understood. They transformed me from an interviewer into a witness, having witnessed the believers' testimony. Furthermore, in three testimonies other individuals were present who affirmed statements made by the elders. Although the presence of other individuals during an interview violates confidentiality, the presence of others who could affirm individual participants' statement was validating and added to the trustworthiness of the contents. Furthermore the presence of these other individuals made the testimony a true community and participatory process. Testifying was the unanticipated phenomenon derived from a qualitative design.

In my work with the older persons in this study, the interviews elicited rich description. Telling their stories facilitated the amplification of voice. The participants claimed their power to name their experience. The opportunity for the story teller to name their experiences is both liberating and empowering for a research participant. Naming one's experience is an antithetical approach to traditional research approaches where the researcher names the "subject's" experience for them. Using the participants' own words, their own name for their experience was a means of further affirming their own empowerment and validating my interpretation.

**Empowerment of the participants.** Community psychology theorists have called for research that is empowering to those whom we study (Rappaport, 1994). Empowerment may come through the ability to define oneself, as well as the processes in which we engage. Rappaport writes:

An empowerment world view requires knowing (not just knowing about) the particular people we claim to understand because we have provided an opportunity for them to speak for themselves. (p. 368).

In this study, older persons had the opportunity to speak for themselves. In addition, I attempted to engage them in a research process which was empowering by addressing some of the power differentials implicit within traditional research (Walsh, 1987). I feel that speaking for themselves about their experiences was an empowering experience for these elders. However, I suspected that my presentation of their stories was by comparison a minor detail. These individuals possessed personal strength and power which were evident in their stories. If "word sound has power," then the act of testifying reaffirmed their reality, their authority, and their personal power. In my role as the researcher, I did not empower these individuals; rather, their participation in the study was empowering because telling one's story is a powerful act.

### **Research Design:**

**The Participants.** Between July 14 and August 11, 1998, I interviewed eight Jamaican older persons, seven of whom were women and one man, who ranged in age from 70 to 102 years old. I interviewed seven women at various sites throughout the greater metropolitan area in Kingston and rural sites in St. Andrew, Jamaica. The only man in this study was an older Jamaican on vacation in Toronto, Canada, where I interviewed him. The eight people in this study represent a purposeful sample as they were deliberately approached for participation in the study due to their involvement in the community. Since I was studying older persons' community participation, I only interviewed those older persons who were active or had been active in their community. These individuals were typical of older persons involved in their community and they often referred to other senior citizens persons engaged in community organizations and active in community life, indicating that they were not unique in their level of involvement and activity in comparison to their peers.

**Entry to the Settings.** Staff at the National Council for Senior Citizens in Jamaica introduced me to seven women who were members of the senior citizen's organizations sponsored by the council. Two regional organizers from the National Council for Senior Citizens contacted prospective interview participants and asked various senior club members both female and male, if they were willing to participate in the study. The only man in the study was introduced to me by a colleague to whom he was related and whom he visited here in Canada at the time of the interview. A total of eight Jamaicans of African descent participated in this study.

**Settings.** Interview settings varied from private dwellings to public meeting places. I conducted two of the interviews at the National Council's head office in Kingston, Jamaica, one at a senior's club meeting in August Town, St. Andrew Parish, another one at a church in the Olympic Park area of Kingston during a senior's club meeting there, and four interviews in private homes.

**Ethical Considerations.** One way of empowering persons in the research process is to engage in participatory research in which the people being studied become involved in data collection, analysis, and writing. Another way of empowering persons in the research relationship is by acknowledging the power differentials within the research context by transforming the traditional researcher and researched relationship through the use of language. By using terms such as participant the "subject" the individual's passive position is transformed into an active position, and the hierarchical position of the researcher to the "researched" participants is collapsed onto a more egalitarian plane. I refer to the older persons in this study as participants.

I explained the purpose of the study to each participant and informed them of their rights and my responsibilities to them while they chose to participate in the study. For each participant, I read over the information letter [See Appendix A] and the consent form [See Appendix B] and clarified

points when they asked for further clarification. Prior to receiving consent, I asked the participants to select a pseudonym in order to ensure that their identity would remain confidential. Five of the participants elected to have their identities remain unknown, while three of the participants did not select a pseudonym, but elected to have their identities known. I explained the purpose of using another name other than their real name to these three participants and they still chose to have their identity known.

**Interview Procedure.** Using a semi structured interview guide with open-ended interview questions, I explored the concepts of community participation and personal definitions of being old. The interviews incorporated elements of oral history in that I asked the participants to tell me their life history at the beginning of the interview. I guided the telling of this testimony by questions regarding family composition, community involvements as a young person, demographic information such as the number of children they had and marital status. [See Appendix C for the interview guide with the specific questions I used during the interview.]

I tape-recorded all of the interviews. While interviewing the participants, I made written observational notes to complement the interviews I tape recorded. I interviewed each participant once. On average, interviews were 45 minutes long, ranging between 25 minutes and 90 minutes in duration. Although some of these interviews were short, the fact that they were semi-structured allowed me enough time to obtain information on personal, life-course histories and current community involvements.

**Other Data Collection Methods.** Staff at the National Council for Senior Citizens and I visited a nursing home and a club meeting. While at the club meeting, I photographed the group. For the group photograph, I asked participants to sign their name to a sheet, giving me permission



to use their likeness as part of my research. My observational field notes contain observations of the site visits, and summaries of conversations with staff at the National Council for Senior Citizens, and with Dr. Denise Eldemire, an epidemiologist and gerontologist at the University of the West Indies. I kept a diary of my reflections on events, places, and people I met while conducting this research. These are also included as part of the data.

**The Research Relationship.** It was important to establish credibility and trust with contact persons and the interview participants for this study. To do this, I explained my interest in doing the study from the point of view of being an African-Canadian woman with older Jamaican parents living and actively involved in their community “abroad.” I also explained my interest in what older Jamaicans at “home” would say about their lives, their community, their participation, and their views on growing older. Although, we did not share age in common, cultural knowledge was a plane on which the participants and I did meet to a great extent. Thus, their experiences would be recorded and interpreted through more familiar ears and eyes than that of a foreign researcher with no “roots” in the Jamaican cultural context. I felt that the personal connection between my cultural background, my parents’ stage in life, and my interest in learning more about my cultural heritage may have been other factors to my gaining quick access to persons interviewed and in establishing a trusting and respectful research relationship. In addition, I also disclosed that I was a Christian which was another similarity I shared with the people interviewed because all of them were Christians as well.

Contact persons, who included the staff at the National Council for Senior Citizens in Jamaica and my colleague who introduced me to her vacationing grandfather, were instrumental in setting up the interviews. The contact persons were individuals whom the participants trusted, and

it is this element of trust that facilitated the entry stage of the research relationship between the participants and myself.

**Risks and Benefits.** I reassured the contact persons and the research participants that the study would in some way be beneficial to the community and would not be harmful to the participants. Since most of the participants chose a pseudonym, the risk of being identified was eliminated for these participants. Even those participants who chose to be identified and whose names appear in the thesis, faced minimal risk. Only Mr. Gordon faced a risk of a backlash from opposing party sympathizers for his statements about the Jamaica Labour Party. However, Mr. Gordon was aware of this and chose to be identified anyway. The benefits of participating in the study are more intangible than tangible. The participants could potentially gain satisfaction from having an opportunity to tell their stories, to testify. Their disclosure of social, economic and political information could be used to provide added support for seniors' benefits and programs.

**Feedback.** I informed the contact persons and the participants that I would provide them with a copy of the final manuscript. In addition, I provided addresses and telephone numbers where I could be reached while in Jamaica and in Canada, should they have any reason to contact me.

The results from the interviews are contained in the finding section below.

## **Findings**

As mentioned in the methods section, research methodology and approaches should reflect the language and epistemology of the people with whom we do research. In keeping with this idea, I have used language relevant to the participants in this study whose identities include being Christian and Jamaican. In the section below, I provide glimpses into the lives of the eight older persons who participated in this study in the form of the personal testimonies in the section I entitled “Elders’ Testimonies.” “Testimonies” is the term below which I selected to entitle the personal profiles presented. In my thesis, a testimony is the believer’s account of their experiences and insights along their life’s journey. This terminology is relevant considering that the older persons or elders in this study are Christian believers. Although, I did not obtain these testimonies in a religious setting such as a church, they served the purpose of imparting experience to me similar to that which takes place in churches. Following these testimonies, the section entitled *Witnessing* contains my analysis or interpretation of the data summarized in the *Elders’ Testimonies*. I thought the word “witnessing” would be congruent with framing the research process within the Christian experience. Using the language congruent with the identity of the participants allowed me to join with them in a space defined by theirs’ and my religious identity. *Witnessing* contains an analysis of the emergent themes that emerged within the testimonies under sections entitled *Roles, Sites, Meanings, and Perceived Social Context*.

### **Elders’ Testimonies**

Each testimony is a summary of the interviews with the older persons I interviewed. I wrote each testimony based upon the verbatim transcription of audio taped interviews with the participants. I also used observational notes taken at the time of the interviews; as well as, I used notes I recorded

after the interviews in my own diary to compose the interview summaries. Ally, Bych, Mrs. W, Lanni and Mrs. Murray are pseudonyms selected by those participants who wished to remain anonymous. Mr. Sterling Gordon, Mrs. Lynch, and Mrs. Frankson did not wish to have their identities concealed, perhaps indicating that the interviews represented a form of testimony. In understanding the importance of testimony in the lives of persons who identified themselves as Christians, I respected their wishes to be identified in this research. To me this meant that these individuals were assuming active and participatory roles in the research process by telling me how they wished to contribute. The testimonies highlight some demographic information such as birth date, age, marital status, children, grandchildren, general location of residence, and education. All of the participants were Jamaicans of African descent.

## Ally

Ally (pseudonym) was a wiry framed woman, small in stature. Large yet bright eyes darted at me from beneath her plastic framed glasses set on her thin face, framed by brown and grey hair drawn back into a chignon under a straw hat. Like the other older women who had made their way into the large, yet somewhat cool cement bungalow with its ivory coloured walls and brown wood trim, Ally was dressed in a short sleeved blouse and gathered waist skirt. In the bungalow which houses the National Council for Senior Citizens in busy uptown Kingston, a council staff member introduced me to Ally as the “student” who “would like to speak to some seniors about the club work.” A retired dressmaker, Ally devoted her time to the St. Andrew Senior Citizens’ Club as the club’s president. We commenced our interview in the bungalows’ front foyer occasionally interrupted by greetings from seniors passing by on their way into the council office.

In 1927, Ally was born in the parish of St. Andrew, Jamaica, where she lived as her mother’s sole child. Ally’s father had six other children, Ally’s five brothers and her sister. She grew up on the same street where she was born, attended school and eventually married there. While growing up, her community was a quiet place in a time when “mothers . . . had a lot of children,” according to Ally. She attended primary school during the 1930’s depression era and advanced quickly through elementary school. Of these years, Ally stated, “In those days we studied more, we respected our teachers more. So, you find that the teachers would love [the students equally] . . . They weren’t partial. Everybody would have to do the same.” According to Ally, teachers, parents and other community members worked together to nurture and guide children.

As a youth during World War II, Ally was involved with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) learning dance, arts and crafts, and home economics. Ally’s community

involvement with the National Volunteer Organization (NVO) allowed her to apply some skills she gained at the YWCA. In her capacity as a youth leader with the NVO, Ally acted as a mentor and instructor with younger people. Ally was not yet 19 years old, but she was responsible for coaching and leading games such as cricket, rugby, netball, and organizing tennis and dominoes matches. She also taught sewing, embroidery, crochet, coronary pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), and home economics to female and male participants alike.

On being a young person in Jamaica during the 1930s and '40s, Ally suggested that older persons spent time with young people. She added that in recent years older people have "deprived" the younger generation of their talents and experience -- something she received in her youth. For example, Ally talked about the making of hairpin lace and tatting as skills she learned from older persons in her youth. Older people were more involved in passing on cultural traditions and practices -- something that she stated, "I was glad to be a teen in Jamaica for" during that time.

It was 1946 in post World War II Jamaica when Ally married at age 19 years old. She had her only child by age 20, continued her community involvements, and worked as a dressmaker outside the home. When asked about her motivation to continue involvements in the community while raising a family and working at King's Jamaica Shirt Factory, Ally responded, "Although I was working, I had time to give to others." Imagining a young energetic, and confident Ally who efficiently managed home, employment, and community worlds was not difficult for me.

Learning, teaching skills, and leading leisure activities have been major activities for Ally throughout her life. As the current president of the St. Andrew's Senior Citizens' Club, Ally continues her life-long contributions to her community. In 1983, she became involved with organizing seniors in her community. Staff from the then National Council for the Aged, learning

about Ally's leadership skills, proposed that she initiate a seniors' club in her area. Since Ally's initial involvement, the club has provided a social outlet for many seniors in the St. Andrew's area. Ally is a recognized craft worker and trains other clubs' members in CPR. Her club has "adopted" a child in the community and provides him the material support he needs including tuition for school -- all of this despite the fact that many of her club members struggle financially and are mostly blind. In addition, Ally was involved as an interviewer in a project gathering the life-stories of older people. She believes that people must start from where they are and with what resources they have to live a full life and to give back to the community. Seeing the needs of others has inspired Ally not only to organize on behalf of her community, but to advocate for necessary resources. She illustrated the last point when she told me of her efforts to open a closed medical clinic in her area after it had been closed due to labour disputes with government officials. Ally has a strong sense of ownership in her community which she embodies when she stated, "God didn't put the fruits on the tree fa just' de ownna . . . God give you a likkle talent, man, use it among yuh people!"

## **Bych**

It had been a busy day, having gone from one end of Kingston to another, as I accompanied the Kingston organizer for the National Council for Senior Citizens on her rounds. We stopped at a Church of God in Christ in the Olympic Park area of Kingston. The Olympic Park Senior Citizens club got off to a running start only a few short months earlier, yet there were approximately 30 members present on this day. The day of our visit, club members were throwing a birthday party for an 80-year-old woman who had not previously celebrated her birthday. This was her first birthday party. The organizer spoke with another senior woman. We were introduced and entered the church hall for the interview.

A small bodied woman with a straight posture, wearing a cap from under which peeked dark brown and grey plaits, Bych (a pseudonym) barely looked like a 70-year-old grandmother with 13 grand children. Bych was born in Labrynth, in the parish of St. Mary, a small rural area, in 1928. She was the youngest child in her family consisting of six sisters and three brothers. One brother and one sister have since died.

Agriculture was the major activity in the Labrynth of Bych's youth. Life consisted of hard labour and poverty. Despite this reality, Bych did well in school and enjoyed participating in sports activities such as cricket, football (soccer), and netball. However, she left school early due to her pregnancy in adolescence. Bych stated, "I neva even finish my schoolin', I went to fift', I neva went to six [standard] . . . I had to leave school. Yuh nuh know, de ole people dem murma about it, I neva get the privilege, so I neva go back."

At age 17, Bych left her son with her parents in the country and went to Kingston, where she stayed with her sister until she found employment as a domestic worker. According to Bych,



Kingston was where she finally “found a gentleman . . . and married him around 1951.” Bych and her husband had three boys and one girl. Along with raising their children and working outside the home, Bych cultivated a small garden from which she sold its produce. She sold vegetables like callaloo, fruits, and candies. Bych’s husband was a musician who repaired mattresses. Despite the fact that life was hard, Bych stated, “I work, and he worked also, but we were just happy.” Bych and her husband were members of the Jamaica Labour Party and belonged to a lodge. Their children participated in church activities, such as Sunday school and concerts, “until they grow big an’ on they own” Bych added.

Bych commented on the changes in community life she has observed over the years. Bych stated:

. . . It was a different community. When we first came here, we neva run a wire or fence . . . just two stran’ a what they call a burrow wire -- just to show ova here is yours and ova dere is not yours, and we leave anyting out-a-door, nobody teef nuttin.

Now, if dey even have de place fence up, yuh find people jump ova [the fence] . . .

I lock my gate every night.

Despite the fact that crime has increased over the years, Bych and her neighbours live together harmoniously. She currently has borders -- “a woman in her fifties, a young man, and a pregnant woman. And I want to tell you we jus’ live like one.” Neighbours, young and old alike, lovingly call Bych “granny.”

In her church, a Church of God in Christ assembly, Bych was a member of the prayer band. Although she participated in church activities as a child, Bych stated, “I neva have . . . sometin’ of

mi own -- responsibility." Bych's responsibilities in her church included praying with and for the sick as a member of the prayer band and chaperoning young people on church outings.

Bych's involvement with the seniors' group is fairly recent, since the group's inception was in March 1998. Bych put her all into whatever she was doing, and fundraising for the seniors' club is no exception. She was the top ticket seller at a recent concert organized by her club. Bych spoke about the sense of togetherness that she receives from the group, ". . . since I bin here . . . de bredren when we meet wid -- just nice . . . all of us live like we are one . . . we share . . ."

## **Lanni**

A meeting of executive members for seniors citizens' club was about to begin on the grounds of the National Council for Senior Citizens head office. A staff member introduced me to Lanni (pseudonym) who was the president of her local senior citizens club in rural St. Mary. Lanni was a tall, full-figured woman with gold rimmed glasses and silver white straight shoulder length hair which was curled under and held away from her smooth skinned face by a hair band. She appeared to be in her early 60's, but is in her 70's.

Lanni had been living in her community in the parish of St. Mary since she was 14 years old. It was the community where Lanni married her husband and where they raised their six children. Lanni and her husband had nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. A month before our interview, Lanni lost her 90-year-old mother for whom she provided care.

While raising her children, Lanni worked as a dietician's aid at the University Hospital where she worked for more than 25 years. Besides working outside of the home, Lanni also continued her involvement with the Mother's Union, taught Sunday school, and remained a member of the 4H Club. As young person in school, Lanni began her involvement with the 4H Club. At an annual agricultural fair at the Denbigh Show Grounds in Clarendon, Lanni received prizes for food preparation.

At the time of our interview, Lanni was the Enrolling Member for the Mothers' Union in the Anglican church in her district. Lanni explained that as the Enrolling Member, she was responsible for registering new church members. The Mothers' Union provided care for shut-in older persons in the wider community by regularly cooking and washing, and cleaning their homes twice per month. The auxiliary also gave shut-in senior citizens a small donation and a care package with

needed items. Fundraising activities such as bingo parties and concerts helped to support these efforts, and provided the community's basic school with a lunch twice per month and Christmas presents for the children. The Golden Agers' club of which Lanni was an active member provided assistance to older persons who have difficulty living on their own. Members accompanied the community nurse who visited these seniors twice per week and distributed care packages to older persons during these visits.

Lanni described how she became involved with the senior's club:

After I stop work, I didn't go into any other volunteer . . . They have one there they call the Friends of the Hospital, but I didn't get involved with that at all. After I decided to get involved with the senior citizens and they didn't have any club up there [in her district] . . . I really should be in the Citizens' Association, but you can't get people to understand some things . . . they didn't see why we should have to have a senior citizens' association . . . after I said it here and spoke with Mrs. Sam [pseudonym] she seh 'well try get some [people] together and start'. So it [seniors' association] is outside of the Citizens' Association.

Despite the challenges of losing her house in a fire in 1995, Lanni exemplified her tenacity and undaunted spirit when she said, ". . . we have a saying here in Jamaica, 'when you think you are bad, there is somebody worse than you!' . . . I've neva dropped out. I've neva failed anything. I've always been smiling. I don't say . . . 'yuh nuh si mi nuh 'ave.' . . . I believe the more you do the Lord look out for you."

Agriculture was the main economic activity in Lanni's community in the hills of St. Mary. According to Lanni, her community consisted of people who struggled to obtain necessities such as shelter, food and clothing, people with limited resources who can help others and others who are materially comfortable. Lanni, who was a pensioner, described herself as not having "it," but was able occasionally to help someone else in need. Community institutions included one all-age school, a preparatory school, and two churches, one Anglican and the other Pentecostal.

### **Mrs. Lynch**

I interviewed Mrs. Lynch [her real name], the founder, former president, and current secretary of the Antrim Gardens Seniors' Group at the home of Mrs. Frankson, the group's vice president. A semi-retired teacher, she has been married to Rev. Lynch for the past 45 years and has one adult daughter. A tall woman, with a medium build and gold rimmed glasses who looked younger than her 76 years, Mrs. Lynch began her story with a synopsis of her activities across the span of her life. She stated:

. . . as a young woman, I was very active . . . in church, school and community . . .

Although, I [taught], I still find a little time to continue my community work. At retirement, I continue my activities. . .

Mrs. Lynch's involvements as a young woman include membership in the Jamaica Agricultural Society (JAS), the 4H Club, Sunday school class leader, Sunday school teacher, choir member, organist, and president of the Girls' League for adolescent young women over 15 years old. She described herself as born and raised in church and felt that this was a foundation for continued involvement in church. Mrs. Lynch's love for speaking with others, exchanging ideas, and what she described as "mixing and moving" makes community work second nature for her.

In 1995, Mrs. Lynch initiated the Antrim Gardens Seniors' Group. After a brief involvement with the Citizens' Association, she identified the need for a senior citizens' group where their voices would be heard and where seniors would determine the group's activities and outcomes. She stated, "I saw the need for senior citizens to get together, to form a group, and do our own thing." Mrs. Lynch expressed that the Citizens' Association did not always address the needs of seniors. She felt that the seniors' group would provide an opportunity for seniors to plan their futures together. When

she had the idea to start the seniors' group, she consulted with her neighbours and together they started the group on her veranda. The seniors invited the Kingston Organizer for the National Council for Senior Citizens to visit and to provide the group with added support. "We had a very interesting meeting that evening and we [were] all encouraged to go ahead with the group work."

The Antrim Garden had 21 active members who met monthly. The group's activities included visiting the sick, blood-pressure checks, and income-generating projects. The income-generating projects, which included, selling detergent, soap, and other household items, helped to support the club's work with physically challenged children at the National Children's Home. The seniors engaged in activities such as story-telling and "moving around [the children] for a few hours" and provided items such as clothing and a wheel chair. Beyond the inter-generational activities, fundraising, health promotion, and friendly visiting, club members socialized, worshipped, and went on outings together.

When I asked Mrs. Lynch about her thoughts on the community's regard for the seniors' club, she answered that she believed the club has a presence in the community and that the community supports their efforts through their purchase of the club's products. The Antrim Gardens Seniors have been recognized by the National Council for Senior Citizens for their efforts in culinary arts, crafts, caring program and for their other projects. The caring program consisted of providing assistance to shut-in seniors by helping them in their home and giving them a care basket with food and personal care items. Despite these accomplishments, Mrs. Lynch conveyed that there was a perception on the part of the community that older persons are slow in movement and are distant from the reality younger persons face. The club has been attempting to involve younger members to bridge the gap and continue their inter-generational work at the children's home.

Mrs. Lynch's community involvement was paradoxical in that she felt saddled by her many responsibilities that she admitted keep her going. For example, in her Methodist church, Mrs. Lynch served on the chapel steward and the society steward boards and plays the organ every second Sunday. Chapel stewards assist the pastor in worship services; and, society stewards assist the pastor in administrative concerns. However, Mrs. Lynch knew her limit. This busy worker decided recently to give herself a break, saying:

They seh, even Christ himself when he was on earth needed some rest. He would go aside and rest for a while. He was flesh and blood like us, so he needed rest . . . So, we too need some rest -- flesh and blood.



### **Mrs. Murray**

After visiting a seniors' club in bustling downtown Kingston, the organizer took me to meet a woman who resides in a small one room dwelling provided by and located on the same property as the Anglican Archdiocese. Upon our arrival, we met two other women who stopped to visit as well. I was introduced to Mrs. Murray [pseudonym], a tall slim woman with white hair and supple, smooth brown skin who does not appear to be a day over 70. She had just celebrated 102 years of life a few days earlier.

Born in 1896, Woodford, St. Andrew, Mrs. Murray told me that she still cooks her own food, manages light housework, and is able to keep up her personal care. She has lived through the first and second world wars, six British monarchs, the hurricane of 1903, the earthquake that destroyed Kingston in 1907, and speaks of the Titanic's sinking as though it were yesterday. Mrs. Murray's community involvement has been exclusively through the church.

As the youngest of 11 for her mother and father, Mrs. Murray was "spoiled" by her mother and elder siblings. Mrs. Murray and her mother, who taught her how to sew, had a close relationship. As a youth, she took piano and violin lessons, participated in the church choir, and eventually taught Sunday school. Upon the death of her mother in 1921, Mrs. Murray ceased playing the piano and has not played since.

After the death of her mother, Mrs. Murray and another young woman, both of whom lost their mothers, went to live in the home of Rev. and Mrs. Jones [pseudonyms], where they were cared for. Mrs. Murray stated, "I learned a lot of things because they treat us as their children. We were members of the Sunday school choir . . . I became the only contralto in the whole Woodford area." When Rev. Jones and his wife passed away, Mrs. Murray went to Kingston and worked as a

butleress for two years with a prominent business man, a year and half for a banana exporter and briefly as a nanny to three girls whose father was a department store owner. Mrs. Murray met her husband while at her last position. She stated, "I got married from there . . . I met this little man . . . we got married, and I haven't been out to do that [work outside the home] from [the day she married]." According to Mrs. Murray, she did not have to work because she "was left in good hands." Mr. and Mrs. Murray were married in 1937 and spent 36 years together in the house which he bought for her. They had two children, one boy who passed away in infancy and a girl. Their daughter had 11 children just like Mrs. Murray's mother. Mrs. Murray now has eleven grandchildren and five great grandchildren. A widow of 25 years, she moved four years ago from her marital home, unable to keep up with the demands of its upkeep.

Mrs. Murray's sense of community came by way of her loving relationships with neighbours and tenants. Mrs. Murray enjoyed her relationship with neighbours which was characterized by reciprocity in the giving and receiving of assistance and advice. She recounted her life on Forest Street [fictitious name]:

. . . everything was so good . . . everybody help each other, everybody would be coming to me 'Miss M, so and so and so . . .' Though I was a young wife, I became the mother of the whole [community] because everybody is coming to me. What-so-ever it is, they would come . . . They would go with me to market and we walk together. What I didn't understand to buy, they teach me . . . When every thing is over, they would take mi basket, an' yuh si dem a hol' dis big big married woman likkle han' comin' home . . .

The Mothers' Union in her Anglican church was the site for Mrs. Murray's community involvement. She baked cakes, boiled guava jelly, catered parties, acted in plays, sewed costumes, and performed in concerts. Mrs. Murray took in borders. She commented, "We used to live together -- my tenant and myself -- we live as one family." As an older woman in her 90's, Mrs. Murray took into her home a young woman and her two young children. She expressed that the woman was like a daughter to her and became a foster-grandparent to her two children. Mrs. Murray stated:

Their mother, when they came to live with me at Forest Street, just empty-handed. So, I took them in as my own children. She's [the children's mother] is working in the post office now . . . I neva charge her one cent for rent. I took her in with her two children. I give her a room wit two beds and her two children were living in a room until they are still living in the home . . . They call me grandmother . . .

Although Mrs. Murray does not currently live with her foster family, they still live in her former home and visit her regularly to assist her with whatever she needs.

Mrs. Murray did not get involved in political issues, she stated that in the 1920's and thirties during Marcus Garvey's African repatriation movement, "everyone was a Garveyite." As a couple, the Murrays visited other couples and together they would discuss the political events and issues of the day.

Mrs. Murray became active with the senior's group in her area several years ago, however she does not get out to meetings anymore. Now the senior and non-senior aged volunteers visit her as they did on the day she was interviewed. They assist Mrs. Murray with whatever she needs. All of us sang "Happy Birthday" to Mrs. Murray on the day she was interviewed. Her church held a

special event in honour of her 102nd birthday the Sunday before our interview took place. In 1997, a women's organization honoured 101 year old Mrs. Murray as woman of the year.

### **Mr. Gordon**

A colleague, who was aware of my recent trip to Jamaica to conduct this research asked me whether I would like to interview her grandfather from Jamaica who was vacationing in Canada. She explained that he was an active community member. I agreed to meet him at the home of one of his children. His granddaughter introduced us.

Mr. Gordon [his real name] was a compact framed man of 82 years with more pepper than salt hair, and twinkling eyes. He was neatly dressed in a tailored pants and short sleeved shirt. Born September 10, 1916, in Gordonwood, a small rural district in St. Catherine, Mr. Gordon was the second eldest child in his family and grew up with only one other sibling after his mother and father separated. After his father remarried, Mr. Gordon helped to support the younger siblings from his father's second marriage. In all, Mr. Gordon had six sisters and three brothers.

As a child in school, Mr. Gordon enjoyed math and scripture, two subjects that he applied in both his career and voluntary positions. He stated that his teacher, who taught him at the Old Harbour Primary School, was very fond of him. However enjoyable school was to Mr. Gordon, by age 15 he had to leave school to join his father on the farm where he raised cows. Mr. Gordon's father also had a business selling coal in Kingston. It was this early involvement with his father's business that fostered Mr. Gordon's entry into entrepreneurship. In 1940, at the age of 25, Mr. Gordon opened a grocery and haberdashery. He later went on to successfully cultivate cane which he sold to manufacturers.

In 1940, the same year he went into business, Mr. Gordon was confirmed in the Anglican church and served as an acolyte. Mr. Gordon's involvement as an acolyte in the Anglican church in Church Pen, a place outside Gordonwood, had implications for his small community.

Gordonwood was without a church. Thus, Mr. Gordon took it upon himself to minister to the people there in his position as an acolyte. He assisted the priest in visiting the parishioners in Church Pen and visited community members in Gordonwood. In these visits, he would talk with people, pray with them and for them, and provide them with counselling. Mr. Gordon encouraged many people to join the church, advised them on marital issues, and other life matters. Helping the priest with communion and performing funeral services were his other duties. Mr. Gordon is the godfather to over 20 people, for some of whom he has performed funeral services.

In 1944 at age 28 years, Mr. Gordon married his first wife and together they had five children. In 1961, both he and his wife travelled to England. While there, Mr. Gordon worked as a construction labourer doing the same work as the tradesmen, but without the same designation. By early January 1963, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon returned to Jamaica and to his two businesses. His wife died in 1968 after 24 years of marriage. Mr. Gordon married his second wife in 1974 when he was 68 years old. They did not have any children together. In 1994, Mr. Gordon became a widower for the second time when his second wife died. Since then, he has been living alone. All of Mr. Gordon's children have left Jamaica -- two live in the United States and three live in Canada. He has over 20 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

In 1951, Mr. Gordon changed denomination and became a member of the Seventh Day Commandment church, which has headquarters in England. Along with the other members of this church, Mr. Gordon held religious services in a shed on his property. In 1986, the sale of a portion of land Mr. Gordon inherited from his father provided the funds to build his church. This church is "the only church building in the district, up to now" stated Mr. Gordon. According to Mr. Gordon, "The pastor in charge . . . he came and fahm the spiritual pawt . . . I put up the material part, wit de

help of some people . . . who give free layba an' such de like . . .” Currently, he is a deacon in his church.

Mr. Gordon became a justice of the peace in 1977 at age 71 years. He was nominated for the position, which is voluntary, because he was considered an “independent” -- someone who displayed leadership, integrity, and financial independence. As a justice of the peace, Mr. Gordon is a signing authority for government documents such as passports, road licenses, and summonses. He also tries petty cases in court.

Mr. Gordon is a former Jamaica Labour Party supporter who changed after his assessment that the party was not operating in the best interests of most Jamaicans. Unkept political promises motivated Mr. Gordon to become a member of and chairman for the People’s National Party which he still supports. His leadership was not limited to politics. Mr. Gordon was the captain for both his cricket team and dominoes team. Participation in community life has meant a lot to Mr. Gordon. He stated:

Participation means a lot to me. For, when I go into dem, I feel more satisfied, I feel more justified, and I feel more honourable -- to participate in a ting.

### **Mrs. W.**

I accompanied a National Council staff member as she visited the August Town Seniors Club meeting. She introduced me to the club president, Mrs. W., who gave me a brief history of August Town. I interviewed Mrs. W. [a pseudonym] during one of the clubs' weekly Thursday sessions held in an 80 by 40-foot cinder block and cement classroom behind the Catholic church Mrs. W. attends. This classroom also housed the summer school where approximately 40 children were present on the day I interviewed Mrs. W. Between the seniors, the children and the materials used to build the classroom, the setting was quite noisy which posed a challenge in recording this interview.

Mrs. W. was born in 1918. A rosy cheeked woman with sandy brown and silver-streaked hair plaited into a pony tail, Mrs. W. appeared to be much younger than her 80 years. She was a widow with four adult children and three grandsons. Two of Mrs. W's grandsons were orphaned after the deaths of Mrs. W's daughter and son-in-law. For approximately 15 years, Mrs. W. singlehandedly raised these two boys and another grandson who are now 18, 21, and 23 years old respectively. One of her grandsons still lived with her at the time of this interview.

In her community, Mrs. W has been a social worker for 40 years. Prior to her career in social work, Mrs. W. was a teacher. Since her retirement as a Child Protective Services worker 20 years ago, Mrs. W. has been a family counsellor at the family court. Thus, she still participated in the labour force despite her age. Informally, Mrs. W. has been a foster-parent to several children over the course of her life.

Mrs. W began her involvement with the August Town Seniors' Club in 1979. As a pilot project to bring together area seniors, the University of the West Indies started the club in 1965. Mrs. W. was asked to lead the senior's group in 1979 and continues to do this. She has also served



on the board for the National Council for Senior Citizens. Mrs. W. showed me the current craft project, decorative cushions, that the club's members were sewing in preparation for an upcoming evaluation of their handiwork. The Catholic church where the club meets weekly provided the meal that was later shared amongst the club members. The club comprises mostly female members. At the time of our interview, there were 11 women and one man present -- more members were expected to arrive during the six-hour session. Mrs. W. told me that they have had as many as 200 members on a given day.

When I asked Mrs. W. about her other involvements outside of the seniors' club, she replied that she is an active church member. Honoured by the pope for 56 years of service, Mrs. W. is a religious instructor in the Catholic church. When asked about her motivation for being involved in community activities, Mrs. W. replied, "I just like to be with people. I'm a people person. First, being a teacher, and then, you know, as a social worker . . . I am just continuing because I am alive and able."

### **Mrs. Frankson**

On July 23, 1998, I met Mrs. Frankson [her real name] at her home in the Antrim Gardens area of Kingston. Antrim Gardens was a middle class neighbourhood with decorative iron security fenced, enclosed homes with well-kept gardens and tiled car ports. Mrs. Frankson's home was no exception. A retired high school teacher, she was 74 years old, but her smooth skin, slender frame, and just-below chin-length hair parted and plaited in two, belie her age. When we first met earlier that day, she was working in her garden. Mrs. Frankson did not feel that adopting a pseudonym for this research was necessary for her. In fact, she wished to have her identity known as the telling of her story was a testimony.

As a young person, Mrs. Frankson participated in and won prizes for sports, music, and agricultural competitions through school. She was a soloist with her school and church choirs and won medals for track and field. Mrs. Frankson's teaching career began when she was a young person growing up in rural St. Catherine. In describing her career, Mrs Frankson stated:

I started teaching in the St. Catherine's Hills . . . I went on to Moneague Training College . . . after which I taught five years in the primary schools. I got a scholarship to the University of the West Indies -- did a course in natural science . . . I taught at the Kingston Technical High School for the rest of my teaching life. There I was involved in a variety of things, Tutor for School Challenge Quiz, Convenor for Science Exhibitions, Counsellor.

For 30 years, Mrs. Frankson taught at the Kingston Technical High School. The Kingston Technical High School, its students and faculty were and still are important parts of her life. Mrs. Frankson continued to volunteer at the school although she has retired and stated:

I still have a very good relationship with a lot of my past students . . . I still feel a part of the Kingston Technical High School and will always be until I'm not there . . . When we want somebody, like when they short of a teacher, they ask me to come in.

Mrs. Frankson shared some stories and insights gained from her teaching years. "Some bitta, some sweet" were words Mrs. Frankson used to describe the paradoxical nature of her teaching experience. She openly expressed that some of her students went on to do quite well in life, but, others were not so fortunate. It was on behalf of those students that were less fortunate that Mrs. Frankson became an advocate. She shared stories of children who had been neglected and abused by parents and other care givers, and of students who due to local politics were oppressed within the school by another teacher.

While teaching Mrs. Frankson assisted her husband, also a community worker, in his transport business. Beyond this, Mrs. Frankson remained active in her church as a Sabbath School Teacher and Guidance Counsellor. Mrs. Frankson, a former Anglican turned Seventh Day Adventist, is currently an advisor to her church's executive board.

Mrs. Frankson did not have children of her own, however, that did not stop her from being a foster mother to many children. "I can scarce count the number of children that I rear in this house . . . I remember one holiday I had fifteen of them here."

At the time of this interview, Mrs. Frankson was the vice president for the Antrim Garden's Senior Citizens' Club. She spoke about the fellowship found within the club. ". . . every hand do everything in this club," Mrs. Frankson responded in reference to the egalitarian nature of the organization and the different formalized roles within it.

The Teachers' Union and political party membership were among the other affiliations that Mrs. Frankson had in the past, and she stated that she has abandoned politics altogether. At the time of our interview, she leaned more toward her church work, admitting, ". . . my plan is not to convert people. My plan is to inform."

In these eight testimonies, I have attempted to capture a glimpse of the person in context and convey their personal strengths. Therefore, references to social, political and economic elements of context were reflected within each testimony. Demographic information, personal milestones, and motivation for participating in the community were also included. These testimonies included some information about the roles played in and sites for participants' community involvement. I explore the themes that emerged from these interviews in the data analysis below.

### **Witnessing: Analyzing the Data**

The data analysis began during the painstaking transcription of participants' interviews. I transcribed each testimony using the participants' spoken language. Throughout the testimonies participants spoke English interwoven with Jamaican Patois, a language derived from West African, Spanish, and English languages. Patois evolved from the African slaves' contact with Europeans. Thus, some linguists interpret it as a "creolised" or "recreated" language which is a variation of standard English. However, Alleyne (1988) argues that Jamaican language is just that, Jamaican language, and is not "Creole" or "Patois," rather it exists as a language symbolizing resistance to cultural domination, particularly by the British during slavery and colonialism. Honor Ford-Smith's Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women (1987), a collection of plays about the lives of Jamaican women, was an invaluable resource in validating and affirming my transcription of Jamaican Patois. A glossary of terms unfamiliar to readers is included in the Appendix E.

As I listened to these participants' voices and typed their words, I noted in a separate memo, points that participants emphasized through changes in their vocal inflections. The memo contains the elders' words and phrases that I found relevant and applicable to the concepts of community, participation, activism, and growing older. Other phrases pertained to social commentary or personal philosophies. Recording phrases in the memo were my initial attempts to partition and code the data according to the organizing concepts in this study. Upon completion of the transcription process, I began the task of reading the interviews several times and coding the data according to common and uncommon experiences among the participants.

I performed the data analysis utilizing a variety of techniques as suggested in Maxwell's (1996) work on qualitative research design. Thus, memos, categorizing strategies, and contextualizing strategies all formed the basis for my analysis of the data. While transcribing each interview, I initiated the process of recording those items that I felt intuitively would become major coding and thematic categories in the memo. After transcribing the interviews, I reread each interview four times, each time looking for emergent themes, convergent and divergent experiences, and the words that the participants used to define the concepts, community, participation, activism and being old. Community, participation, activism, and being old became coding and thematic categories. I then constructed matrices for these themes and coding categories that emerged.

In this thesis, I had the following working definitions for community, participation, and activism: community is defined as the geographic or social body to which a person belongs and to which a person feels a sense of belonging; participation is defined in this thesis as voluntary individual involvement in collective action for the purpose of an outcome that benefits the collective whether the nature of the collective and activities are political, social, economic, cultural, or religious; and activism is defined as involvement informal or formal advocacy, lobbying, consciousness raising, or mobilization on behalf of or with an individual or community around an issue or for a cause. The convergent and divergent experiences and emergent themes were recorded in a memo. The results of this process are described in greater detail in the section below.

Partitioning the data initially involved highlighting demographic information such as birth dates, family size, marital status, rural or urban location of residence. In order to capture how participants were involved in the community, I highlighted participants' descriptions of their activities, positions and titles, and the types of settings where they were involved. These descriptors

were coded and put into categories pertaining to roles and settings. Four general categories of roles emerged from the coding of descriptors found in the transcripts. These role categories were leader, teacher/counsellor, advocate, and member/supporter.

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were applied to the roles that emerged. An advocate is defined as a person who acts on behalf of a group or an individual or in defence of a cause. A leader refers to one who organizes and leads or guides others. A teacher / counsellor instructs or advises. A member/supporter takes an interest in or supports an organization or cause.

Similarly, four general categories were found from the descriptors of places or settings where participants were involved. Church, education, employment, and community organizations (includes service, political, recreational, civic, professional, economic, and social groups) were the main categories that emerged from the descriptors found in the interview data. First, I constructed two matrices, one for roles and the other for community settings.

In the "roles" matrix, leader, teacher/counsellor, advocate, supporter/member were those role categories assigned to separate quadrants representing the four separate domains. Similarly, I constructed the "community settings" matrix by assigning church, employment, education, and other community settings to the separate quadrants/domains.

Having only have two matrices when the participants provided wonderful life histories that involved community participation over an extended lifetime did not seem sufficient. Furthermore, one research question pertained to developmental stages of life influences on community participation. I categorized the developmental stages into adolescence and early adulthood (youth), middle adulthood (adult), and older adulthood (older persons). Although these categories seemed

broad, they were appropriate for the participants in this study. For the purpose of this study, youth includes adolescents and young adults between ages 13 and 24 years old; adults include persons 25 to 64 years old; older persons include young old, old, and very old ages 65 and older. Subsequently, I re-read the interview data and coded roles according to the three main developmental stage of life categories. Applying the stage in life as another level in the analysis provided the basis to make some statements about roles over a lifetime, to make comparisons between stages of life for each participant and inferences about the group of participants as a whole. Eventually, I had constructed three role matrices each for a particular developmental stage of life and by that expanded the levels of analysis. [See Appendix D]

I then coded the data according to meanings for the terms community, participation, activism, and old. Community refers to a group of people having interests or locality in common. Activism in this study refers to political action. Participation refers to involvement. The following sections contain the findings from the process of coding and analyzing the interview data. [See Appendix D]

### **1. Settings:**

**Church.** Compared with other settings, church was the site in which all of the participants had consistent involvement across the three main stages of their life. Starting as children and adolescents, the participants attended Sunday school and were active in youth auxiliaries. During adulthood, the interviewees continued their involvement in church along with their families. In particular the women were active in women's auxiliaries and Sunday school. As older persons, they remained active in church where they assumed advisory and leadership functions.

**Employment.** As adolescents, two participants assisted their parents as field labourers on either a subsistence farm or larger farm business. Early exposure and limited opportunities dictated



later involvement in some sphere of cultivation in later life for these individuals. For example, both of these participants had to leave school early due to financial reasons, and one due to pregnancy in adolescence. However, for these two participants, cultivation offered them the opportunity to become self-employed. Thus, one of these two participants became a supplier to the sugar industry, while the other became a higgler (market seller).

Six of the seven female participants were employed outside the home while raising their children. Only one female participant was not employed while raising her child, but she had been a domestic worker prior to marriage. This participant and the woman who was also a market seller were the only two women who reported being domestic workers. Another woman was a hospital dietitian's aid. Three other female participants had been teachers, one of whom became a social worker. Five of the participants held more than one type of employment throughout their lives and two participants simultaneously held two jobs. The male participant was self-employed as a cultivator and shopkeeper.

Three of the female participants continue to work past retirement age due to economic necessity. One works occasionally as domestic and in selling her own produce, another is employed full-time as a counsellor, and the other as a teacher. All three are widows.

**Education.** Two participants left school early due to limited finances, and one of the two due to pregnancy. Universal secondary school education was not available in Jamaica at anytime during the participants' adolescence. Participants who attended secondary school were probably those individuals whose parents could afford to send them or who themselves had earned scholarships to attend secondary school, hence higher education. Three such participants were teachers and one later became a social worker, having received professional training in post

secondary institutions: Mrs. Frankson, Mrs. Lynch, and Mrs. W. All of the participants spoke about involvement in extracurricular activities in school, such as athletics, music, and school based agricultural programs.

**Other Community Settings.** Four of the participants reported that they were involved in organizations promoting skills development in agriculture for young people, such as the 4H Club and the Jamaica Agricultural Society. These four participants were raised in rural areas. One participant, raised in a small urban area, reported that she was a member of the Young Women's Christian Association and the National Volunteers' Organization. These youth-oriented organizations were designed primarily to prepare young people for employment in an agricultural-based economy with small manufacturing in urban areas, and secondly to provide them with recreation.

In adulthood, four of the participants were affiliated with political parties. Three participants were active party members and one participant was a party chairperson in his local district. However, only the male participant remained an active supporter of his party. Two women were involved with professional unions, and one remained affiliated with community service organizations from her youth. A female participant was affiliated with a lodge. The only man in the study was affiliated with sports organizations where he served as captains for cricket and dominoes teams. As elders, all of the female participants were involved in senior citizens' organizations. The only male in this study had a brief affiliation with a senior citizens' group, but was actively volunteering as a justice of the peace. He engaged in leisure activities, such as dominoes with neighbours, while the female participants engaged in much of their leisure activities through their church or senior citizens' group.

## **2. Roles:**

**Teacher/Counsellor.** Three female participants started their teaching careers during the latter part of their youth. However, one of these two women continues to work part-time beyond retirement in order to supplement the household income. Another teacher changed careers in middle adulthood and became a social worker, and continued employment in this field despite the fact that she is long past retirement age as well. All three of these women taught church school (Sunday or Sabbath school) in their religious community, besides the Jamaican school system. Altogether six female participants taught church school during adulthood. One woman continued to teach life skills to youth for an organization in the wider community and first aid to seniors.

By elderhood, five participants were advisors, counsellors, or teachers in their church as well. As mentioned above, a participant was employed as a counsellor pre and post retirement. The male participant in the study also assumed counselling roles during his adulthood and during elderhood in both religious settings and in the wider community, respectively as an acolyte in the Anglican church, then as the pastors' assistance in the Seventh Day Commandment Church, and as a Justice of the Peace.

**Leader.** For most participants, leadership responsibilities in church as a youth seemed to set the pace for these types of roles in later years. Two female participants occupied leadership roles as youth in their church and wider community settings. For example, one woman was a leader in the Girl's League in a female church auxiliary, and the other was a leader in youth activities in the Young Women's Christian Association, and the National Volunteer Organization.

By adulthood, the male participant and two female participants occupied leadership roles in business, church, and recreational settings, respectively. For example, the male participant was an entrepreneur who owned his own shop and a commercial farm where he cultivated cane, was an

assistant to the pastor in his church, and the captain of his cricket team. A female participant served Sunday school superintendent. The other female participant was a small scale urban farmer and entrepreneur who sold produce and other items in a market.

Early experiences of leadership, teaching/counselling may have built some participants' sense of efficacy, mastery, and self-esteem that carried over in elderhood. In particular, these roles involved financing a capital project on behalf of their church, advising the church board, founding and leading seniors' organizations, and serving as executive members in other church, political, recreational, and social settings. Thus, leadership during later years is a common experience to all of the participants in this study.

**Advocate.** Four female participants assumed advocate roles during their later years. However during adulthood, two participants became advocates on behalf of children who were emotionally and physically abused and neglected in their capacities as a teacher and a social worker. One woman, who did not have any children of her own, became a foster parent to more than 15 children. The other woman still acts as an advocate on behalf of abused children and adolescents. As older persons, four seniors initiated seniors' organizations in their community. Two of these women advocated rights of seniors to have an organization that would serve the interests of older persons when other community organizations ignored their particular concerns. An equally fitting title for at least two of these four women would be that of community organizer, as their organizing helped to meet community needs.

**Member/Supporter.** In many cases, all of the participants were members of organizations in which their functions were less well defined, but could be classified as serving a supportive function. However, during youth and adult years, participants held memberships in a variety of

settings providing support to community organizations. These diverse groups ranged from agricultural association to political parties, such as the 4H Club, Teacher Union, Young Women's Christian Association, and the Jamaica Labour Party and the People's National Party. The most consistent membership has been in the church. All of the participants were church supporters across the span of their life. Second to the church has been membership in senior citizens' club in elderhood. One female participant, continues her affiliation with the 4H Club.

### **3. Lessons: Elder's reflections and definitions on community, participation and on being old.**

The following is a collection of the participants' reflections on their meanings for community, participation, activism, and their thoughts on being old.

#### **Participation:**

**Participation as taking part in activities.** Involvement, sharing, and togetherness were terms the participants mentioned most frequently, along with the phrase "take part." Mrs. Lynch, Mr. Gordon, and Mrs. Frankson said that to them participation meant to take part in things. Mrs. Frankson stated, "I think participation is to . . . to take part -- what part you play in the whole scheme of life around you . . . contribute." Similarly, Mrs. Lynch said, "to take part in whatever activities we do." Mr. Gordon also stated, "You take part in tings." Mrs. W. stated, "Participation means value for the group which is fellowship, help, being friendly, just to be together."

**Participation as sharing.** Participation was associated with the concept of sharing. Bych suggested that participation meant sharing and said, "Live together -- if I have anything . . . you should be able to get sometin' out mi, as well as, if you have it, you give it to mi. . . . Sharing!" Ally defined participation this way:

There are many ways of participating in things. You participate in like church activities, even like the club activities. You can participate with a sick person. You can participate with a young person. Trying to pass on the best of what God has provided. Telling them where you comin' from, let them know you, or hear you, help. Try tellin' dem, well, don't walk there because --. Give of them what you would like for yourself. Being always there for someone that needs it.

**The effect of participation on participants.** The outcome of participation, or rather the effect -- the impact that it has on the individual -- was mentioned by Mr. Gordon and Lanni, who mentioned feeling useful and satisfied. Lanni commented, "Participation to me is . . . what-so-ever is to do with the community you get involved . . . It makes you feel useful, you know." Mr. Gordon said, "Participation means a lot to me. For when I go into dem [activities], I feel more satisfied, I feel more justified, and I feel more honourable -- to participate in a ting." Mrs. Frankson conceptualized participation in the idea of giving back, another form of sharing also noted by Bych and Ally. Mrs. Lynch and Mrs. W also conceptualized participation as togetherness. Sharing, togetherness, and taking part define the term participation to the older persons in this study. Participation made them feel useful; and they considered it as a source of satisfaction in their lives.

### **Community:**

**Community as a geographic area.** Participants defined community in terms of physicality and relationship. Mrs. W. used community to mean the people in a specific geographic location, particularly in close proximity when she spoke about the relationship between neighbours. She stated, "It is my neighbours." Bych offered, "Community means people live around de area

where I'm livin.'" Mrs. Lynch stated community is ". . . an area -- people living together in a community."

**Community as a relationship.** Mrs. Frankson also echoed the idea of community as a geographic entity. Yet she stressed the importance of people and relationships and stated, ". . . I think it is really the involvement of people in a certain geographic area, people-based and not land-based." Mrs. Murray also felt that community connoted relationships with neighbours. Ally expressed her thoughts regarding the word community by remarking, "Community is kind of cooperation. Everybody works with each other."

**Community as a process.** When I probed further and asked Lanni if her parents were involved in community work, she spoke about how her mother had always helped neighbours who were less fortunate. Yet, later in the interview Lanni added, "She wouldn't see it as community work . . . She neva turn away anybody . . . she always go an' help them . . . yuh only seh its lovin', you neva look on it as community work." Mr. Gordon, on the other hand emphasized his role in the community and stated, "Well, the community means to me -- I try to help de people."

**The effect of being in community.** The effect of being in the community was exemplified by Mrs. W.'s statement that, "It is very fulfilling. It helps keep me alive. I use four words at my house -- alive, alert, aware, and awake . . . in it!" However, Lanni reemphasised the effect of living in a community and said, "Well, it makes me feel happy to know that I'm living' in a community that I respect people and I feel they respect me."

Community was conceptualized as relationship with benefits for those who engage in that relationship. The idea of living together means sharing and giving to each other and is essential to

the concept of community. Community is not a static concept; it is not a noun, but rather the term refers to a dynamic exchange connoting activity, and thus is a verb to these elders.

**Activism:**

Those participants who responded to the question regarding the meaning of activism placed emphasis on activity. Mr. Gordon commented, "keep active" Mrs. Lynch suggested, "I take it to mean active, takin' active part." Mrs. Frankson responded by saying, "relates to activity." I asked Mrs. Frankson, if she considered herself an activist, she replied, "No, I am not an activist. I like to tell people about the Lord. That's what I do most of the time." In addition, I asked if she had ever found herself involved in activities that were more issue-based or political, Mrs. Frankson replied, "Yes and no, in the sense of what I'm looking at any special moment. Sometime, politically based, sometime not. I'm not a politician." I probed Mrs. Frankson further to learn whether she felt some of her work with youth had furthered social justice and perhaps fell within the realm of activism. Mrs. Frankson answered, ". . . I purposely do that -- to see that social justice is the way to end suffering. I personally did that." Lanni stated that activism did not mean anything to her. Bych interpreted the question to mean activity and said that it was "giving." Mrs. W. felt that activism was more for younger people.

Ally said the activism meant "you are in everything." Since activism meant activity to most participants, I asked participants more about activity. When asked, participants expanded on the word activity by attaching it to the concept of health. They saw activity as essential for well-being. For example, Mr. Gordon spoke about the recreational and therapeutic activities that enhance his overall health -- such as playing dominoes with a neighbour, taking occasional sea baths, and walking. Mrs. W. spoke about the benefits of staying socially involved through her profession and



through her volunteering with her seniors' club. Similarly, Bych, Lanni, and Ally felt they would give to their communities as long as it was physically possible. Given that most of these older persons were active in a variety of settings, the concept is not limited to physical activity, but reflects the social, professional, and economic activities that form parts of their reality. Activism as a political activity is not a part of the current reality for these older persons, although a few of them were involved with political parties.

### **Community, Participation, and Activism:**

I asked the participants to express their thoughts on the connection between community, participation, and activism. Ally suggested, “. . . to combine those together, you must have love. You have to learn to mix with others. Then, do the best you can to be seen or heard of in those three phase of life. You have to be active.” On the connection between the three concepts, Mrs. W. said, “We are neighbours first of all. I have to run to you before I would run to a politician, or church, or something like that. It is my neighbour.” Expanding on this personal connection with individuals, Mrs. Lynch offered the following:

. . . you live in a community, we move in a community, we live in a community, we are active in a community. We know each otha, we talk to each otha, we move around each otha. If you are in a distress, we try to help the person.

The connection between community, participation, and activism or activity, is just that connection -- between neighbours who you see and speak with everyday. To participate, to have community, and to stay active in these areas, you must have love for your neighbour. Love then is the motivating force that binds community, participation, and activity together.

### **On being old:**

I asked the participants to define the concept old. Mr. Gordon answered, “. . . anytime you reach seventy according to the bible, you are old . . . If you’re a man you can still ‘avin’ children, yuh know. But, you can’t wear that title until you become seventy.” In terms of himself, eighty-two year old Mr. Gordon considered himself old. I asked him how he felt about being old, he said, “Well, I am happy for I have children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and one of my great grandchildren may have a child too [chuckling] . . . Sunday, I was de happiest man at the park avin’ all my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren around me.” Mr. Gordon was speaking at a family reunion organized by his children who reside in various parts of North America. He stated that he now has more than 20 grandchildren.

Our sense of ourselves is as often a reflection of what others perceive as it is what we project to others of ourselves. Regarding Mrs. Frankson’s self-definition of old, she stated, “Age-wise, I am seventy-four years old.” In terms of what old means to Mrs. Frankson, smiling she said, “It’s time . . . I’ve spent some time -- another Methuselah.” Mrs. Frankson spoke about how she is perceived in her community. She commented that young people in her neighbourhood often referred to her as “Motha Frank, or Aunty, or Grand Ma.” Mrs. Frankson felt honoured by these terms and expressed, “I love that! It is saying to me that I am somebody who they want to communicate with. They could pass by, but they have that sense -- I feel that it is something . . . they respect me.”

“They say age is just numbers,” Lanni suggested in response to the question concerning herself as old. I then asked her who would she consider to be old. Lanni said:

I never really consider until I heard my grandchildren talk. Is like say they bothering me and I said, “Listen, oonu leave in ya, see mi too ole fi merry.” They would tell you said, “Mamma, ole people siddung inna dem chair pon veranda.”

Lanni and I both chuckled. To Lanni's grandchildren, old people are inactive and sit rocking in a chair all day. To this image, Lanni responds, "Well, we are seniors and we get involved . . ."

Bych said that old was, "from seventy go up." However, Bych felt she was old. Mrs. Lynch said, "I am old." Then she suggested, "You is as ole as how yuh feel . . . tiredness makes you old."

Commenting on the community's perception of older persons, Mrs. Lynch expressed:

. . . they are sitting, down, and old and cold-up demself like old people -- look ole people . . . their [younger persons] ideas are that you have grey hair, you walk slow, you don't associate with them . . . You don't talk with them. You keep you head high."

Mrs. W. defined her age as, "I have maturity in my attitude . . . I find myself more active than my grandson. Older people have time to continue with activities. Activity keeps you young."

Again, Mrs. W. echoed the comments other participants made regarding the community's perception of older persons:

. . . you have those that think that old people must just sit down and don't do anything. Some younger people mistreat older persons and take advantage of them by leaving kids for their parents to look after. They feel their parents should just sit down.

Ally spoke about the degeneration of the body, loss of senses, and reduced movement as signs of old age. Ally stated she is old physically, but not old mentally. She commented that the community did not behave positively toward older persons and said, "They are not loving to elders."

The biblical reference point seemed to be one that people used in defining old. However, most participants suggested that older persons' inactivity was an image that the community held and

that this image was responsible for older persons perhaps being taken advantage of and not treated kindly.

### **Involvement and stage of life:**

I asked participants to respond to the question: "Does your age or stage in life have anything to do with your involvement in the community?" I hoped that this question would reveal motivations and other factors contributing to participants' community participation during later years. Mrs. W. said, "Its my lifestyle" regarding the importance of the older stage in life on her community involvements. Engagement in the community is a part of Mrs. W.'s way of life and a part of her identity. Lanni's community involvements during these latter years reflect her attitude. She said, ". . . I will go until I can't go any more." Ally did not think her stage in life had anything to do with her involvement in the community. She implied that her role in the community is a part of her identity when she said, "They always call me 'nurse' in the club." Bych also did not feel that her stage in life had anything to do with her involvement in the community. In contrast, Mrs. Lynch felt "saddled" by her involvements in the community. Concerning the church responsibilities, Mrs. Lynch said, "Um hum, they saddle me like donkey. I ask them every day take off some. I have to keep on reminding them that I am old now, its' time for me to sit back." In her senior's club, Mrs. Lynch has relinquished her position as president and took on the task of secretary, something she felt would be lighter for her.

### **4. Perceived Social Context**

Throughout the interviews, the participants commented on the changes that they observed in intergenerational relationships and the community overall. The following section contains this commentary.

**Intergenerational relationships:**

Bych, Lanni, Mr. Gordon, Mrs. Lynch, and Ally commented on what they saw as a general misunderstanding between younger generations and older persons. Many participants felt that younger generations in the past generally held a greater respect for their elders and authority figures. In particular, Mr. Gordon and Bych expressed that diminished role of the church and religion in the lives of younger persons was connected to the devaluation of the family, community, and particularly older persons. They suggested that non involvement in church was an indication of the younger generations' misguidedness.

Bych suggested that youth' general lack of respect for older persons is reflected in individual encounters with elders. She cited personal experiences as examples of the indifference of youth toward older persons when she spoke about young people who curse in her presence. The responses from younger persons range from apologies, reflecting sensitivity and deference, to increased and exaggerated cursing, reflecting contempt.

Meanwhile, Ally felt that the community failed to nurture and guide young people, as perhaps it once did. She stated,

It's not a loving community when it come to dese younga generations. To me the things they hear at home, conversation that they hear parents hol'-up 'bout one anodda turn dem off.

Ally and Mrs. Murray spoke about the collective responsibility assumed by parents, teachers and other adults in the community for child rearing. Ally provided a glimpse of the social context of her youth:

As a child, you could not misbehave before an elderly [person], even a child couple years older than you . . . parents would guide other mothers' children and they were able to scold a child of other parentage . . .

Mr. Gordon and Ally commented on the role teachers played in their lives. They suggested that teachers had more love for their students than teachers do currently. Furthermore, Ally perceived that students today compared with students in the past were more respectful of teachers and each other. She commented:

"In those days we studied more, we respected our teacher more. So, you find that the teachers would love . . . even children at school were more loving to each other. . . ."

Ally spoke at length about child rearing today, stating that many parents are raising their children without the value for community. According to Ally, the children from these homes misbehave in school due to their misguided upbringing. If community members also perceived a greater stake in nurturing their young, then an example of a young person nurtured by community members would be Mrs. Murray. She spoke about the role the minister and his wife played in hers and another young woman's life after the death of their mothers. The minister and his wife took them in, gave them a home, and supported them until they were ready for life as independent women.

Contrary to the notion of a more loving and supportive community, Ally and Mrs. Murray also spoke about the abuses of adult authority in a community where all children were expected to obey all adults. In particular, these women spoke about the fact that just as parents were entitled to and expected to use corporal punishment when children misbehaved, other adults, including strangers, who caught a misbehaving child could use corporal punishment as well. In addition, children greatly

feared other authority figures, such as the police. Ally added, "Some of us would pass [police officers] and wouldn't look in their faces, at that time. We walk away from them because you would always hear police hol' on you an' carry you to jail an' beat you . . . it's fear."

Mrs. Lynch suggested that young people misunderstood older people and held an image of older people as distant or unapproachable. Subsequently, this stereotype feeds the communication gap between younger people and older people. She thought that it was not just youth, but middle aged people who did not understand older people's perspectives. This misunderstanding of older persons' lived reality is what motivated Lanni and Mrs. Lynch to become involved with the seniors' organizations. These women said that they encouraged younger persons to get involved with the seniors' by volunteering and spending time with them. Ally added that the benefit to younger members is that older persons can teach younger individuals skills which can generate income. The need for a space for seniors to get together socially, to stay active, and to address their concerns motivated the other women in this study to organize with other older persons.

### **Challenges to Seniors:**

The seniors' clubs address some needs family members used to fulfill. Lanni, Ally, and Bych spoke about the fact that many seniors have children who live abroad. While for many seniors, this may mean that they are being materially and financially supported by these children, too many have children who are unable to assist their parents at home. To survive, many seniors continue to labour, often doing back-breaking work, according to Lanni and Mrs. Lynch. Bych admitted that she continued working "a day's work" occasionally.

Mrs. Murray commented on the different expectations of men and women as to education and employment in early twentieth century Jamaica:

. . . in days gone by, there was no trade besides, the boys that left school learn either carpentry, or tailoring, . . . or cultivating . . . we the girl children they were send out to learn dress making. As for me, I went to learn dress making.

Farming, carpentry, tailoring, or dress making were trades that lead to self-employment or employment in small scale businesses that would deny these workers the opportunity to contribute to company pension plans.

Many older persons in Lanni's community were employed in fields such as agriculture and domestic work for which they received no pension. Although Jamaica does provide a basic pension for all senior citizens, the amount is not enough for many older persons to live on. As three interviewees explained, many seniors who should not be working because they are ill, continue to work because it is economically necessary. Lanni explained the difficulties that some older persons in her area experience:

Some of them never really work where they could earn a pension . . . some of us have our pension, it's very small, but it's still something. Jamaica pension is like this. I get my pension every month. Suppose I want to have a good breakfast and a nice dinna. It can't give me that. Yuh know, it's so small, but I mean it's betta than those who have *nothing* at all. Some of us have children that will look afta them, here and there. While, some of them have children and don't hear from them. Some of them . . . might raise the grandchildren, [but] when the grandchildren get big [they ignore their grandparents] . . . So, some of them have it hard.



According to Mr. Gordon, he “used to see ole people suffa,” which motivated him to plan for his retirement while he was self-employed. Other seniors who also were self-employed may not have ever made enough to provide for their retirement years.

Mrs. Lynch commented that many seniors may not make it to seniors’ club meetings because of the amount of housework, including child care, they have. Between paid occasional work, child care provided to grandchildren, and other care-giving tasks, there is little time for any other activities. Club members who were present during Mrs. Lynch’s interview echoed this explanation of why more older persons do not get involved with community endeavours. Lanni commented on the older persons in her community:

You have some of the elder people that are in the senior’s clubs that they are working and those people work, because they don’t have any help so they can do a little work. We’re in a coffee area. So you will find some of them will even tell you they can’t come to meetin’, because they was pickin’ coffee and tings like dose.

Looking on their backs, I wonda how much some of them can take.

Yet, there are those older persons who despite their obvious disability continue to participate in seniors’ organizations. For example, in the St. Andrew Seniors’ club the majority of members are blind, according to Ally.

Personal safety is an issue that many seniors face. Seven of the eight people interviewed expressed their concern over growing crime in their communities. Mr. Gordon said that his home had been broken into by armed robbers. One of the participants whom I interviewed at her home had protective iron bars on her windows and enclosing her patio and carport. Other participants, such as Ally, felt that fear of crime restricted her movements. Ally explained that she does not attend

meetings at her church in Kingston on week nights due to the crime associated with this city. Bych explained the difference between when she first moved to her community and now. According to Bych, 40 years ago neighbours were respectful of each other's boundary lines to the extent that properties required only minimal fencing if any. Now, thieves who have moved into her neighbourhood are not intimidated by the most challenging fence. Bych stated, "Now, if deh even have de place fence up, you find people jump ova."

All of the women expressed an aversion to politics. They were involved with the seniors organization and church, having little time nor interest in politics, it seemed, despite the fact that Bych was a former Jamaica Labour Party member and supporter, and Mrs. Frankson was also a member of a political party. Mrs. Frankson, Mrs. Lynch, Lanni, Ally, and Mrs. W expressed an aversion to politics when they stated they were not involved and did not even vote. These women's aversion to political involvement may reflect the gender discrimination they experienced for their political views and in their political involvements. To many of these women, perhaps, memories of the political violence that erupted in Jamaica in the 1970s and early 1980s repelled them from voting. Although not as active as he once was, Mr. Gordon is a former JLP supporter turned PNP supporter. Mrs. Murray commented on the politics and race consciousness of Jamaica during the twenties and thirties when she stated, "everyone was a Garveyite" in reference to the early Pan African and repatriation political movement spear headed by Marcus Garvey. Further, Mrs. W. disclosed that some of the members of her club were the original settlers in August Town who had followed radical spiritual, social, and political preacher Alexander Bedward. Although these seniors currently may not be active politically, they have witnessed and were a part of the politics of Jamaica in some form in earlier decades.

**In the following section, I discuss the influences of culture, historical legacies, and religion in the lives of these elders and their participation in community. Ultimately, I discuss the relevance of these findings to community psychology and the relevance of community psychology in the lives of the seniors.**

## **Discussion:**

### **Culture and Spirituality in Community Participation Among the Elders**

The community participation of the older persons I interviewed in Jamaica suggests that roles and sites for community participation seem consistent over the life span. The church was the most often mentioned as the site for involvement. Individuals who assumed leadership roles early in life continued in these roles later in life. For the female participants, however, child rearing years influenced the choice of roles. One male and one female were the only participants who mentioned having held leadership roles in youth who continued during child rearing years. By elderhood, all eight individuals had an affiliation with seniors' organizations, however, only the women were regular participants in these groups. Thus, church and seniors' groups are primary sites for community involvement for the participants in this study.

In the following section, I attempt to answer these questions:

1. What did participants say about growing old in Jamaica?
2. What role does their contextual reality play in community participation among these seniors?
3. What are the cultural legacies that are manifested in participants' involvements?
4. What elements of personal faith are related to the participants' involvements in community?
5. What can community psychologists in their work with older persons learn from these seniors?
6. How can community psychology support the work of older persons in Jamaica, the Caribbean and the Third World?

### **My interpretation of what the elders said about growing old in Jamaica:**

Lanni, Bych, Ally, Mrs. W., Mrs. Frankson, Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. Murray, and Mr. Gordon shared with me their experiences of growing old in Jamaica. They told me that old age was a time to be active and involved. They rejected the wider community's stereotype of older adults as inactive and slow. In speaking with these individuals, I discovered that attitudes about oneself, about being old, and about faith influenced the participants' work with the community. For these seniors, growing old is accepted as a matter of course, having little to do with the stereotypes of older persons held by the society in which they live. In fact, the participants' level of activity defied the stereotypes of older persons as inactive, non-contributing, and dependent. They were actively involved in church, seniors, and other community groups, in addition to providing support and assistance to family members. In some cases these individuals served as family heads. What I learned from these eight individuals about aging was that growing older does not have to be a stage of one's life where one is removed or that removes oneself from activity or community. Isolation, loneliness, despair, and inactivity do not constitute any part of their reality. These Jamaican seniors are not passively aging; they are actively aging. In the words of Mrs. W, these older persons are "alive, alert, aware, and awake."

**The role of contextual reality in the lives of Jamaican elders:**

However, growing old is not without its challenges. The participants in this study spoke about physical decline, a decreased sense of personal safety, the lack of adequate income support, insensitivity, and disrespect from some younger persons whom they encounter. The latter point the participants attributed to social stereotypes of older persons. Despite the fact that these seniors are active, alert, and aware, they are often treated as though they are helpless, inactive, inattentive, and unaware. Most participants spoke about the inadequate social security pension income on which they

are expected to live. In Jamaica, approximately 55 percent of the total population of people over 65 years old receives the government-sponsored income support (PAHO, 1997). Among persons 65 years and older, a large proportion are supported by family members with whom they live or who live in Jamaica, relatives living abroad, and employment (Eldemire, 1997b; Palmer, 1998). One participant, Lanni, emphasized that even those who have pensions from places of employment still struggle to survive in an economy where the cost of basic commodities is high. Yet Lanni stated that she is better off economically than those individuals who receive no pension or assistance from family. With a high unemployment rate, many younger people are unable to find work. Those who stay in Jamaica find it difficult to support themselves and an aging parent. Others who emigrate may also meet economic hardships in their host countries and are not in a position to support a family member in need at home. Thus, the majority of older persons in Jamaica face a harsh economic reality combined with limited to nonexistent supports (PAHO, 1997).

A high foreign debt severely limits the Jamaican government's efforts to allocate sufficient funding to health care, education, and social services. A weak Jamaican dollar, a high foreign debt, high unemployment and illiteracy rates, and political corruption are factors contributing to an increasing crime rate in Jamaica (Edie, 1991)<sup>10</sup>. Study participants emphasized how their lifestyle has changed in response to the increased crime in Jamaica, particularly in urban centres such as Kingston. Mr. Gordon stated that he avoided Kingston; he was the survivor of an armed break into his home. Ally stated that she does not attend evening prayer services for fear of becoming a victim of crime. The fear of violent crime may restrict and limit other older persons' movement and activities; in ways

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<sup>10</sup>Carlene J. Edie's (1991) book *Democracy by default: Dependency and clientelism in Jamaica* is an insightful and analytic commentary on Jamaican politics.

similar to Ally. Despite her concern for her personal safety, Ally continues her activities, however, she limits her appointments to daytime hours. Ally and the other participants concerned about increasing crime continue to do their community work exercising caution and safety.

Other individuals in this study spoke about how they have been challenged by society's notions regarding older persons and their abilities. They spoke about the growing disrespect that younger persons display toward older persons. These older persons believed that many young people do not have access to older persons and therefore their stereotypes regarding seniors are rarely challenged. Thus, encounters between older persons and younger persons are sometimes influenced by the stereotypes held by the latter regarding the former. Despite these stereotypes, which include views of older people as slow, inactive, and unproductive, the older persons in this study demonstrated that they are the antithesis of these stereotypes.

The commitment to the community is not coincidental for the older participants in this study. Given their personalities, life experiences, and their social situations, community participation among these individuals seems logical. The individuals I interviewed were vibrant, positive, and had personal histories demonstrating their commitment to the community. As all eight participants were Christians and Jamaicans of African descent, I sought to identify the cultural and religious elements, which may have influenced participants' community involvement. Furthermore, each participant belonged to religious, seniors' and/or other community groups. Each person was motivated to become involved with a group not only for a personal sense of satisfaction, but to contribute toward something that would benefit the group, society, or the collective. In responding to the decreasing social value for seniors within Jamaican society (Eldemire, 1997b), it seemed as though these seniors through their group efforts were resurrecting some concepts related to the value for the collective in

an attempt to transform themselves and their community. The seniors that I interviewed disclosed that they shared their personal resources such as their talent, skills, and material resources in their community efforts. As Ally declared:

God didn't put the fruits on the tree fa jus' de owna . . .

God give you a likkle talent, man, use it among yuh people!

Personal commitment of personal resources was used to benefit the collective. Ally's sentiment is not unique in that the other participants similarly expressed their desire to contribute to the community. In keeping with a focus on the role of culture, I looked at the cultural legacies that have come to form the Jamaican identity and the values for the collective therein.

**The role of cultural legacies:**

This value for the collective is both cultural and religious. In the historical development of the sociocultural Jamaican context, the value for the collective is a synthesis of religious and cultural experiences, both of which form a part of the Jamaican national identity. Mervyn Alleyne in the *Roots of Jamaican Culture* (1988) suggests that Jamaican culture entails the continuity of West African culture and religious forms up to contemporary times. Continuity of African forms and the creation of new forms as a result of synthesizing diverse cultural elements constitute the Jamaican identity. However, Alleyne writes:

In Jamaica, one African ethnic group (the Twi) provided political and cultural leadership . . . throughout the post-Columbian history of Jamaica a number of Maroon communities served as custodians of African Culture. (p. xi)

Alleyne contends that, although similar developments took place with Africans throughout the Americas, it is the development of Maroon communities within Jamaica that have been largely



responsible for the retainment of African culture there. The Jamaican culture is a synthesis of African, Aboriginal, and European cultures and religions, respectively; however, the majority population is of African descent. Therefore, the African heritage has had the greatest influence in the forms of community which have evolved<sup>11</sup>. Some scholars (Alleyne, 1988; Ayittey, 1990; Jagers & Mock, 1995; Mbiti 1970; Nobles, 1972) have used the term communalism to refer to shared responsibility for social and economic outcomes within African extended families and kinships. Boykin, Jagers, Ellison, and Albury (as cited in Jagers & Mock, 1995) in their definition of communalism emphasized the interdependent social relationships between individuals and their sense of duty which supersedes their individual rights, privileges, and where group identity is valued over the accumulation of possessions and personal status. Boykin et al. defined communalism as:

an awareness of the fundamental interdependence of people. One's orientation is social rather than directed toward objects. There is an overriding importance attached to social bonds and social relationships. One acts in accordance with the notion that duty to one's social group is more important than individual rights and privileges. Hence, one's identity is tied to group membership rather than to individual status and possessions. Sharing is promoted because it affirms the importance of social interconnectedness. Self-centeredness and individual greed are frowned upon (p. 154).

Other scholars have explained communalism among continental and diasporic Africans by suggesting that African societies are collectivist oriented. These scholars drew reference to various African peoples who practice communalism (Asante, 1990; Alleyne, 1988; Ayittey, 1991; Davis,

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<sup>11</sup>Bev Carey in the *Maroon Story* (1997) documents the historical development of the Maroon culture in Jamaica. Maroon culture is a synthesis of Aboriginal Peoples, namely the Taino and Carib, and African cultures. However, it was the Africans, taken to Jamaica by the Spanish and subsequently that came to dominate Maroon society. Eventually, the Maroons engaged in guerilla war far against the British between 1655 and 1739 as an act of resistance. After 80 years of war with the Maroons, the British signed a peace treaty. Today, the Maroons enjoy self-government and maintain a distinct culture within Jamaica. Carey's work supports the thesis that the Maroon culture that has been a major influence in Jamaican culture.

1995; Nobles, 1972; Rodney, 1972). However, Ayittey (1991) emphasizes that communalism should not be confused with communism or socialism, an error which he suggests Westerners often make. Rather the emphasis within the contexts of African cultures is placed on cooperation and working for the common good which does not call into question the individual's pursuits.

The concern with the welfare of significant social others, contrasted with a concern for the individual are explored from a cross-cultural perspective by Kim, Triandis, Kâğıtçıbaşı, Choi, and Yoon (1994) in their edited text Individualism and collectivism: Theory, method, and applications. Kim et al. (1994) attributed the development of the topic of individualism and collectivism in cross cultural psychological theory to Geert Hofstede's study of 117,000 IBM employees in 66 countries. In his study, Hofstede conceptualized individualism as a bipolar dimension on which individualism was at one end and collectivism was at the other. Hofstede found that Canada, the United States, and Western European countries were high on the individualist end of the continuum while Asian, Latin American, and African nations were high on the collectivist side. To Hofstede "collectivist societies . . . stress [we] consciousness, collective identity, emotional dependence, group solidarity, sharing, duties and obligations, needed for stable and predetermined friendship, group decision, and particularism" (p. 2). These researchers explain how philosophies within a given cultural context support individualism or collectivism. They write:

[I]n East Asian societies Confucianism has provided a moral and philosophical basis for self construal and social order . . . Collectivist societies that support the basic tenets of Confucianism prioritize the common good and social harmony over individual interests. All individuals are assumed to be linked in a web of interrelatedness. . . From a societal point of view, duties and obligations are prescribed by roles, and individuals lose "face" if they fail to fulfil these duties and obligations (pp. 7-8).

In a similar vein among diverse African peoples, obligations of the individual to the kinship/community were based on a set of beliefs. Ayittey (1991) wrote:

A strong sense of family values was pervasive. Kinship was the article of social organization. The community's interest anteceded those of the individual for purposes of survival. However within the community the individual was free-born politically, economically and socially. He was free to what he chose with his life. Life was what he made of it in the community. The African philosophical tenet of "I am because we are" did not preclude individual achievement, prosperity or accumulation of wealth. The philosophical tenet, social mores and obligations merely set the parameters within which the individual could freely operate (p. 257).

The collective orientation has cultural, religious, political, and historical roots in that the enslaved Africans brought with them to the Americas their high value for the community and the collective, and used this value as the basis for their resistance to Eurocentric, capitalist, patriarchal, colonialism (Asante, 1990, Davis, 1995; Hooks, 1990; Rodney, 1972). In my opinion, the community participation of the older Jamaicans in this study constitutes acts of resistance against individualism and ageism. What the system does not provide for these elders, they provide for themselves, recognizing the power that lies in the collective.

**Community participation as an act of resistance:**

Neo-colonialism, individualism, and ageism<sup>12</sup> are the new forces of oppression that seniors in Jamaica face. Resistance against systemic oppression is possible where the concept of the collective is firmly rooted in the mind of the people. In Afro-Creole: Power, opposition and play in the Caribbean, Richard Burton (1997) distinguished between opposition and resistance:

Opposition characteristically involves turning the system against itself by deceit and dexterity, using the means and materials the system offers to outwit and subvert it, whereas before it becomes possible even to consider resistance, there must be some chance of escaping entirely from the system. Opposition takes place when the strong are strong and the weak know it; resistance becomes possible when the weak sense both their own strength and the weakness of the strong. Opposition, in short, belongs to periods of pessimism when all outlets seem blocked; resistance belongs to periods of hope . . . when in de Certeau's terms, the possibility of an "elsewhere" appears. In the concrete case that concerns us, this happened when slaves began to feel that slavery would soon be abolished or even to believe that it already had been. (pp. 50 -51)

Resistance can take on psychological or physical forms. Yet another conceptualization of resistance is one offered by Bell Hooks (1990) in *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* when she conceptualized it as any act that subverts or opposes the dominant forces in society. She stated:

For those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity, our humanness that we have nothing left, no 'home place' where we can recover ourselves. (p. 43 )

According to Hooks, the act of making a home, "homeplace" or creating a community of resistance is a revolutionary act. This definition is based upon the premise of the historical destruction of Black family life and culture through slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Africans in the Americas

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<sup>12</sup>See "U. S. Caribbean relationships: Their impact on peoples" and culture by Ransford W. Palmer (1998) for analyses on the United States' role in the Caribbean and Jamaican politics, economics and popular culture.

adapted the “kinship” to the situations that destroyed bonds between spouses, parents, children, and extended family members by recreating and reformulating family structure to include the role of surrogates -- surrogate mothers, fathers, siblings, and grandparents. Patricia Hill Collins used the term “othermothering” to describe “the practice of women nurturing children along with or in place of their bloodmothers or birth mothers” (in Duncan, 1998, p. 128). The recreation of family was extended to the recreation of the village through the building of community. Thus, the emergence of the surrogate roles within the family and the recreation of the village in the building of community, also constitute acts of resistance within the historical context of slavery and post slavery economic, political and social subjugation of Africans in the Americas, and in particular Jamaica.

In this study, several women had assumed surrogate and “other” mother roles as foster mothers and as “church” mothers. For example, Mrs. Frankson, Lanni, and Mrs. Murray spoke about their roles as foster mothers and foster grandparents. Bych, Lanni, and Mrs. Murray were members of the Mothers’ Union and were church mothers. Mrs. W raised her orphaned grandsons. Mrs. Frankson disclosed that younger persons in neighbourhood often referred to her as “Mother” Frank. Thus, these women were perpetuating the historical “mothering” role on the home-front, in the church and out in the wider community. If the creation of “homeplaces” has been a means of subverting those oppressive structures and forces that attempted to destroy Black families and communities, then “mothers” were agents of subversion. For older persons, creating “homeplaces” via the church and other community sites provides an opportunity for them to re-claim roles lost as society places greater value on youth and less on old age. Particularly in their roles as church mothers’ older women have an opportunity to reclaim and recreate places of honour within the church-home and church-family. Through their various mothering roles, the women in this study were engaged in the continued

resistance against destructive and oppressive forces by nurturing the children and youth of their communities.

Mr. Gordon was a grandfather to over 20 individuals. Through his role in the church, Mr. Gordon was a godfather to over 20 persons. He reported that persons in his family and the community referred to him as Daddy. In Jamaica, it is customary to call older men, "Daddy" particularly those that are respected and admired individuals in the community. In his role as "Daddy" in his community, Mr. Gordon's role subverts the dominant Eurocentric notions of the Black patriarchy and Black father absence. Furthermore, both "Mother" and "Daddy" as terms bestowed upon older Jamaicans in this study are remnants from the historical legacy of surrogate parenting within Jamaica, as such they are also a part of the recreation of homeplaces, both as sites for restoration and for resistance.

The African peoples, the vast majority from West African<sup>13</sup> states, that were taken to Jamaica in captivity brought with them their cultures and religions which share the value for connection, inclusion, participation, extended kinships, communalism, and the importance of religion (Alleyne, 1988; Ayittey, 1991; Burton, 1997; Carey, 1997; Davis, 1995; Herskovits, 1969; Nobles, 1972; Rodney, 1972; Smith, 1976). The remnants of these values are manifested in cultural and religious practices in contemporary Jamaica and throughout the Caribbean. For example, Jamaican *pardna* (partner) and Trinidadian *susu* are cultural practices that are remnants of the Ghanaian *susu* and Yoruba *esusu* are models for collective economics found among many West African societies

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<sup>13</sup>Africans were transported from several ports along the West Coast. Senegambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, Cape Mount to Cameroon, Gold Coast (Ghana) Guiné de Cabo Verde and Congo - Angola are among a few of the places from which the earliest slaves were transported which include the Ashanti (aka Asante or Cromantis), Fanti, and other Akan peoples, as well as Yoruba, Bantu, and Ibo peoples (Alleyne, 1988).

(Alleyne, 1988, Ayittey, 1991)<sup>14</sup>. The elders I interviewed disclosed that they had participated in *pardna* and income-generating schemes that reflected the value of cooperation. Thus, these seniors were modelling indigenous methods of cooperative economics, which should be of interest to those persons interested in alternative economic approaches. *Pardna*, for example is an excellent example of a savings technique based upon trust and unity.

During the dispersion<sup>15</sup> of African peoples throughout the Americas and Europe, from the late 1400s to the mid 1800s took with them their values for connection, inclusion, and cooperation. In addition, they brought along with them the reverence and deference held for older members of the community. Alleyne (1988) writes, "Elderly people are respected and revered in part because they preserve the memory of the dead [ancestors] and are chronologically closer to the ancestors" (p.58). Older persons in West African societies were highly respected and occupied positions of authority, such as leadership roles as elders, and were part of a gerontocracy (Alleyne, 1988; Ayittey, 1991). In the Americas, during and after slavery, older persons played advisory roles, were respected for their knowledge and wisdom, provided care for family members and were heads of families and extended kinships (Herskovits, 1969; Kilson & Rotberg, 1976)

Older women held places of honour and high social status within the family and community, both in Africa and the diaspora (Herskovits, 1969; Hooks, 1990). In many West African cultures older women provide political, social, and economic leadership. For example, the term "Queen

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<sup>14</sup>George N. N. Ayittey (1991) in *Indigenous African Institutions* provides a more detailed description of *susu*, and refers to it as a "revolving credit scheme."

<sup>15</sup>Martin Kilson and Robert Rotberg (1976) in their work *The African Diaspora* used "dispersion" in reference to the enforced exodus of Africans by Europeans to the so-called New World. The Americas may have been new to the Europeans, but was the old world for the Aboriginal peoples living throughout the regions.

Mother” among the Ashanti was reserved for heads of kinships (Duncan, 1998; Yansane, 1990). Carried over into an American context, the role of older women has been best preserved through the church. Church mothers are usually older women in the church, and in some churches, such as the Spiritual Baptist Church a woman leader is referred to as the “queen mother” (p. 12). Throughout the Americas we see the image of the older Black woman as the repository of wisdom, as care-giver, healer, exhorter, and midwife (Arens & Karp, Duncan, 1998; Herskovits, 1969; Hooks, 1990; Kilson & Rotberg, 1976; Lennon, Jolly, Clarke, & Alleyne, 1980; Smith, 1987).

The deference of younger people toward older persons and the some aspects of authority continued within the slavery experience and throughout the African Diaspora through to the twentieth century (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997). Despite the historical legacy of respect and care for older persons in diasporic African communities, migration, modernisation, and the emergence of youth oriented culture has made it difficult for older persons to maintain their status and roles. Chioneso’s (1997) interviews with younger adult Ghanaians and Jamaicans in Canada revealed that there was an element of continued deference and concern for older persons in their value system. Failure to provide for older persons back home would be considered a source of shame and embarrassment. Where sons or daughters were not able to, extended family members were able to provide material assistance and social support. Despite this concern on the part of younger persons, the seniors in this study stated that they knew of seniors who had no younger relatives to assist them.

Thus, I propose that the community participation of these Jamaican elders is part of a larger African diasporic context in which elders have always played an important role in the community. For example, throughout Africa and the diaspora, older persons were seen as extensions or as links with the ancestors (Alleyne, 1988; Ayittey, 1991; Herskovits, 1969). However, the integral role of



elders in communities throughout Africa and the diaspora has been threatened by social, political, and economic factors, such as a marginalized economic position, mass migration due to limited economic opportunities, increased institutionalization of traditional family, faith, and community functions, increased urbanization, the influence of a youth-oriented popular culture, decreased family size, and increased individualism under capitalism and ageism (Alleyne, 1988; Eldemire, 1994; Kilson, 1976; Rodney, 1972; Smith, 1976). These factors have been implicated in the alteration of family structure, the changing value of the roles of family members, and the community concurrently (Eldemire, 1997a; Tout, 1989).

The participants in this study were aware of the changed status of older persons within Jamaican society. These elders could remember a time when older persons were more valued and respected and compared that view with what they currently experience. Those participants who were active in seniors' clubs were creating spaces for healing and renewed strength as evidenced by some of the care giving and restorative functions and activities of the clubs. The women in the study spoke about club activities such as praying for others, providing physical assistance to shut-in elderly people, and supporting each another through difficulties. In reflecting on these activities, I wanted to uncover the source of inspiration for Lanni, Bych, Ally, Mrs. Franks, Mrs. Lynch, Mr. Gordon, Murray and Mrs. W.

### **Spirituality of the elders:**

In this study, older persons named unity, cooperation, and relationship in defining community. In my interpretation of what participants said, the term community describes a relationship in which there is no unity without cooperation and no cooperation without unity. Both unity and cooperation are essential to the idea of the collective. The idea of the collective is also

reflected in the Christian concepts of fellowship and communion. In fact, some individuals in this study used the descriptors such “fellowship” and “together” in their definitions of participation. The Oxford Concise Dictionary defines a fellowship as a community of interest, participation, and sharing. In Christian vernacular, the fellowship pertains to the collective body of believers in Christ. The Holy Bible reveals that the fellowship is the relationship between the believers “. . . one with another” and “. . . with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (I John: 7, 3). The tie that binds both community and participation together for the participants in this study seems to be a sense of connectedness, particularly where relationships are based upon mutuality and interdependence.

Community participation meant sharing, fellowship, and involvement to the study participants. They associated community with cooperation and unity, particularly with one’s neighbours, and all of the people living in a geographic location. Participation meant sharing and involvement, and the acts of giving and receiving. One interview participant, Bych, stated regarding the relationship she enjoys in her seniors’ group, “we and the bredren -- we just live as one.” Mrs. Murray and Bych both echoed, “we live as one,” when speaking about their relationship with neighbours and borders. I interpreted “one” to indicate a harmonious relationship symbolizing unity within a collective. The emphasis on relationships was common to both the ideas of community and participation echoed by many other participants. Community is both a process and outcome of being active and connected. For these individuals involved in community there seems to be a value for the collective -- the idea of the greater good for all. Participants stated that love was necessary in order to be active and participate in community. They disclosed reciprocal acts of kindness and love, and spoke about the ways in which adults modelled this behaviour for them in their youth, thereby influencing their generosity in later years. I would take this a step further to state that it is the “love”

of people and of the community that inspires these individuals to stay involved as seniors.

The study participants expressed a great sense of agency, along with a sense of the power of the collective to impact upon the community -- whether that community is a neighbourhood, a church, or a group of older persons. These individuals spoke about their ability to effect change. They did not use terms, such as change agent or self-efficacy. However, from the participants' testimonies I interpreted the outcome of their efforts as indicative of their roles as change agents. Self-efficacy can be a problematic term, particularly with persons who are, for the most part, collectivist in orientation. However, the seniors in this study seem to have a clear sense of their individual roles in community outcomes.

If empowerment is the result of processes and outcomes of persons being in communion and acting in cooperation to effect change or enhance their sense of efficacy, then empowerment is a part of the participants' experience. Community endeavours for the elders with whom I conversed were characterized by qualities that Riger (1993) stated are "feminine concerns for communion and cooperation"<sup>16</sup>. I observed mixed-gender [predominantly female] groups of older persons throughout the greater Kingston area who participated in decision making, setting goals for the group, and carrying out tasks for which they were fully responsible for group outcomes. For example, Mrs. Frankson stated in reference to the collective responsibility and sense of ownership within the Antrim Gardens Senior Citizens' Club, "Every hand do everything in this club." In response to this comment

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<sup>16</sup>Stephanie Riger's and Janet L. Surrey's definition of empowerment is particularly relevant as most of the participants were female and were active in various groups where they acted in cooperation with others and where they all seemed to derive mutual benefits. However, the presence of a male participant who also displayed these qualities may indicate that communion and cooperation need not be the exclusive domain of women, particularly in Jamaica. As I have shown previously, these qualities are evident in African cultures. I could have easily exchanged "feminine" for "African" in their definitions of empowerment.

the other club members who were present during this interview echoed the same sentiment confirming the egalitarian nature of their group. If however, empowerment is the outcome of a “mutually empathetic and empowering relationships” (Surrey, 1991, p. 164), then the women that belonged to the Antrim Gardens Senior Citizens’ Club were definitely empowered. Although many seniors I observed and a few whom I interviewed were barely able to manage on meagre to non-existent pensions, their affiliation with these groups was a social outlet contributing to their quality of life. Where organizers from the National Council for Senior Citizens were involved with clubs, they acted as facilitators and resource persons with the seniors setting the parameters for their involvement. The study participants engaged in these types of participatory and empowering processes through their work with seniors’ groups and other sites in the community.

The participants possessed a sense of their power to transform themselves and their community, and as such could be referred to as power agents. To assume the community roles that they did, the elders must have believed that they possessed the capacity to effect change in their communities. Thus, these elders are power agents. This idea would be in keeping with the postulate that culture has much to do with the roles these older persons assumed in the community. In Creativity of Power, Arens and Karp (1989) suggested:

Transformation is the key to understanding concepts of power in African societies . . . The power agents have allow them to transform the world. Transformative capacity is a key element in people’s understanding of power, as much as it is the link between actions and agency in social theory. Underlying much of the ritual and cosmology . . . is a sense of power derived from different capacities and abilities used to act on the world. (p. xx)

These different capacities or abilities relate to the roles individuals assume in their communities. In African cultures such as the Iteso, “apedor,” the word for power, means ability or capacity. “Timo”

is the root word for ability which also means action among the Nilotic Luo. The Mande-speaking Loma of Liberia use the word “ghaabaa” to mean ability which is contrasted with physical strength (Arens & Karp, 1989). Alleyne (1988) postulated that Jamaican culture contains continuities from the original African cultures of the people transported there. During the middle of the 19th century during the post slavery era with its accompanying labour shortages, Bantu and Yoruba peoples were among those Africans who emigrated to Jamaica and worked as indentured workers contracted to plantations. Alleyne proposed that evidence of the persistence of African culture and language exists in those places where they settled. These Africans along with earlier immigrants to Jamaica would have brought their cosmologies and rituals that would have informed the concepts of power in their new home. Thus, it is not far fetched to assume that Jamaican culture has within it some concepts of power also reflecting the cosmology of the original Africans. The roles assumed by participants in this study also reflected this concept of power -- the idea of transformative capacity. Taking on roles in their community, the older persons in this study seemed to display this agency of transformative power.

What I learned about empowerment in the lives of these eight older persons was that faith was its source. If there was anything that all of the seniors I interviewed and met shared it was their faith in God. The participants' faith in God and their Christian beliefs are central to their continued work in their community. Faith seemed to be the essence of their giving and sharing with community from what they told me about their lifelong involvements in the church and their statements about themselves. They had personal histories that entailed a life of sharing and active participation. Their early experiences as youth prepared them for their later roles. In particular, roles in religious community settings prepared them for leadership in the church and the wider community. Although

the majority of the individuals were raised in the church, as adults, they decided to continue this involvement through early, middle, and later adult life. Faith was a personal choice and something that was sustaining through life's difficulties for these elders. Active participation in faith communities, which is the church, was a source of empowerment. God supplied the power needed to transform community, they were his agents. Power in this sense is spiritual, willful, and personal.

Although the historical record shows that the church has been a tool of colonialism and oppression, as with other symbols of oppression within diasporic African peoples' experience in the Americas. Historically, Jamaicans have used the church as a site for refuge and resistance (Alleyne, 1988; Burton, 1997). Echoed throughout the diaspora, as a refuge, "the church in black communities became one of the [homeplaces] where members could find a sense of fellowship and community" (Duncan, 1998, p. 126). Many resistance movements in Jamaica were incubated within and carried out by religious bodies. Various religious leaders like Bedward in August Town also contained tenets of Black Nationalism (Burton, 1997). These resistance movements born in the church are similar to Liberation Theology movements throughout the Caribbean and Latin America in the politicization of the church and in the goal of ending oppression. Thus, Jamaicans like other diasporic African peoples were able to synthesize elements within a Eurocentric Christianity<sup>17</sup> intended as tools of subjugation and oppression and to transform them into tools for liberation. Accordingly, in the lives of the interview participants, the church is not a respite or a warehouse for the weary; it is a site of

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<sup>17</sup>I use the term Eurocentric Christianity to emphasize that scholars Molefi Kete Asante (1990) and Walter Rodney (1972) cite the presence of the Christian religion in Africa from the inception of Christianity. Other biblical and ancient world scholars have revealed the African ancestry of the Davidic Line, including Jesus Christ (See McCray 1997 for a bibliography containing the works of Yosef Ben-Jochannan, Cheikh Anta Diop, Ivan Van Sertima and other African antiquity scholars).

inspiration, rejuvenation, and proactive aging -- the church is a site of resistance against forces that negate the value of older persons in a rapidly changing sociopolitical and economic context such as Jamaica. Echoes of the synthesis of faith, culture, and historical legacy can be found throughout the African diaspora (Alleyne, 1988; Asante, 1990; Burton, 1997; Herskovits, 1969; Rodney, 1972).

In terms of their definitions of themselves as older persons, there was an undercurrent of the Biblical reference to old as "three-score and ten" or 70 years old. In many ways, the aging process as depicted in the stories of biblical archetypes, such as Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and Elizabeth served as "ancestral" examples of successful aging -- empowered and active to the very end, despite physical, mental, and spiritual challenges. However, the study participants spoke about physical decline, particularly with regard to the five senses. They seemed resolved that these physical changes were both a "natural and necessary part of life." Despite this "decline" or change, these individuals conveyed that "you are as young as you feel." I interpreted this last point to mean that attitude accounted for much of the experience of old age for the participants. Their attitude toward aging was a positive one in which they viewed themselves as valuable, active, and contributing members of society. However, the study participants did not view their overall involvement in community endeavours as a result of being old. Rather, they seemed to view their involvement as a personal expression of their individuality and an extension of activities across the continuum of their lives from youth through middle adulthood and into later adulthood. Furthermore, it seemed that living by what you believe was important to the participants. Therefore, it was not enough to speak of a fellowship and limit it to a church setting, the idea and practice of the fellowship was extended to other community settings. Mbiti (in Nobles, 1970) stated concerning the congruence of action and thought within an African centred epistemology, "what people do is motivated by what they believe,

and way they believe springs from what they do and experience” (p. 20) or what Asante (1990) calls a “unity of soul and method” (p. 190). The older persons I interviewed “walk” that “talk,” referring to their beliefs and principles by which they live. The participants stated that old age was a time for personal reflection and further spiritual development, expressed more aptly as “a time to get religion.” For persons who have been involved in a religious body over the course of their life, greater spiritual depth would be an objective during old age. The participants advised those not involved in a religious body to get involved and develop themselves spiritually.

Reflecting on Lanni, Bych, Ally, Murray, Mrs. W., Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. Frankson, and Mr. Gordon’s experiences in the community, the concepts of activity and involvement emerge as themes for successful aging. In the next section, I will suggest ways in which the community activities and involvement of these older persons can expand the borders of community psychology with respect to the issue of diversity.

### **Community psychology and Jamaican elders:**

The older persons in this study stand in contrast to much of the traditional literature on growing older that has focused on the disconnection and disengagement of older persons from their community and activities. More recently, greater attention has been given to look at ways in which older persons have stayed active and connected with their community (Tout, 1989; Koshiro, 1996; PAHO, 1999, Ralston, 1984; Saegert, 1989; Stokesberry, 1985; Van Willigan, 1997). Community participation was a factor contributing to the psychological sense of wellbeing of older persons who are volunteers (Eldemire, 1994; Van Willigan, 1997). Programs and groups that incorporate participation, group-decision making, and group ownership provide excellent models for use with seniors (Clark, 1989; Ralston, 1984, Ross, 1983; Tout, 1989b). In particular, it is the relational aspect



of activities and community participation that has a positive health impact on older people (Eldemire, 1997b). Much of what is currently available for older persons has been due to the grassroots activism and advocacy of older persons themselves.

In Canada political in Canada, seniors' political activism is traced back to the Old Age Pensioners of British Columbia, founded in 1932 as a response to inadequacies and inequities within the Old Age Pension (OAP) Act (McPherson, 1998). In more recent years, One Voice, the Canadian Association of Retired Persons, the National Advisory Council on Aging, The Senior Citizens' Coalition, the Manitoba Society of Seniors, and Toronto Association of Jewish Seniors are national, provincial, local, and ethno specific groups engaged in advocating the rights and needs of older persons. The Caribbean-Canadian Seniors' Club, founded by Alexander Russell in 1985, addresses the growing needs of Toronto's growing population of Caribbean elders (H. Stewart, personal communications, November 12, 1999). The United Senior Citizens is an umbrella organization representing individuals and member seniors' organizations with a strong political lobby at the provincial level. This organization has been instrumental in health care, pension, and housing reforms for seniors (United Senior Citizens, 1999).

In the United States for almost thirty years, the Grey Panthers have done much to expand the base resources available to seniors in that country (Kuhn, 1991). The Grey Panthers represents a grassroots movement in response to the "greying" or aging of American society and the success of older persons to serve as advocates on issues related to but not exclusive to those affecting older persons. These individuals recognized that many persons who had been effective advocates for political, social, and economic change in their early and middle adult years were rendered unproductive and ineffective just because they had reached retirement age. Thus, these advocates and

activists were inspired to continue their activism in support of the rights of older people.

In the Caribbean, As mentioned earlier, the National Council for Senior Citizens is a governmental organization supporting the development of seniors' clubs throughout Jamaica. The council is responsible for some of the government benefits available to seniors, such as food stamps and drug cards (National Council for the Aged, 1996). Elsewhere in the Caribbean, St. Lucia has Club 60s, St. Lucia has the National Council for Senior Citizens, and Barbados has organizations for older persons as well (J. James, personal communications, January, 4, 2000).

Much of what participants in this study said about their activities was indicative of grassroots organizing, advocacy, and activism. Although they did not define themselves as activists or advocates, their activities could be described as such. Ally, for example, through her advocacy effort which included letter writing and speaking with government officials, contributed to the reopening of a clinic in her district closed due to a labour dispute. Mrs. Lynch and Lanni through their activism founded the seniors' organizations in their respective districts. Mr. Gordon, although not an active member of a seniors' club, was instrumental in providing the "material part" for the building of his church. He visited the sick as part of his lay ministry. Mrs. Frankson was an advocate on behalf of abused children who attended the school where she taught. In their various capacities as leaders, teacher, counsellors, supporters, and advocates they provided guidance and support to others in their communities. However, when I asked the participants about their political involvements, they stated that they were no longer interested or involved. Female participants seemed to have an aversion to politics. Given that Jamaican politics during the 1970s and 1980s was particularly violent, participants' aversion or reluctance to discuss politics is understandable. The only man in the study was involved in party politics and expressed his opinions freely. All of the women in the study

refused to comment on politics, although two women admitted they were formerly involved with it. Women have been marginalized in Jamaican politics, which also may explain the aversion to politics I observed with the women in this study (Eldemire, 1996; Smith, 1987).

Faced with an aging world population, the World Health Organization (1999) suggests that community efforts must be directed at finding ways to use the skills, talents, and resources that seniors possess in order to promote health and wellbeing among seniors. Seniors can be actively involved in efforts that affect them directly as well as the rest of society. Others can support the work of seniors by utilizing their experience and expertise. Lennon et al. in (1980) found that Jamaican women who had been midwives continued their work as "nanas" into their elderhood, thereby continuing their contributions to society. In developing countries, older persons continue to work due to economic necessity (Tout, 1989). The older persons in this study are living testaments to the value that older persons have in Jamaican society through the important roles they play.

There are great disparities between the resources available to seniors in North America and the Caribbean, which can be attributed to marginal economic positions occupied by the countries in the Caribbean within the larger global economic context (Baker, 1997). As though penalized for seeking independence, many Caribbean countries face an enormous debtload, which limits the capacity of these nations to allocate sufficient funding for necessary health and community resources. The available resources of a country also impact upon the health, quality of life, and wellbeing of its citizens, particularly older persons (Theodore & Green, 1997). However, this is not to say that rich industrial nations such as Canada and the United States with greater resources available to seniors have greater numbers of healthy and active older persons. What seems to be equally important for healthful outcomes for older individuals is their participation in the creation of avenues to ensure

health and wellbeing.

Where resources are limited, such as in the Caribbean, it is the collective ingenuity of seniors that sparks the creation of those means to health and wellbeing for individuals and their community. The seniors in this study showed me how they have pooled their collective energies to provide a better quality of life for not only the seniors in their community, but also for children and younger adults. Similar community development efforts by older persons are taking place in other parts of the world (Tout, 1989b, Tracy, 1991). The elders who spoke with me were involved in philanthropy, intergenerational bonding, economic development, and health promotion as well. For example, the Antrim Garden's Seniors' Club contributed funds earned through income-generating projects to assist with equipment purchases for physically challenged children at the National Children's Home and were also involved as surrogate grandparents to children there without family. Other seniors' clubs were involved in blood-pressure screening, crafts, income-generating projects such as farming, home care, and friendly visits to isolated seniors. Thus, these individuals' participation in church, seniors' clubs, schools, civic judiciary, and other community sites are means to improved quality of life, healthier communities, and the betterment of Jamaican society as a whole.

**Contribution to the literature.** Jamaican values of plurality, diversity, inclusion, and unity can be found within the coat of arms that bears the motto "out of many, one people." Despite these national values, Jamaican society experiences greater individualism, consumerism, materialism and widening disparities in wealth than in previous times. It is against the tide of increased competition for social, health, financial, and community resources that older persons in Jamaica struggle in order to keep their heads up. Jamaican elders have become a marginalized and disadvantaged group within Jamaican society. This is where community psychology can enter. The empowerment of

marginalized and disadvantaged persons is an axiom within community psychology (Rappaport, 1981; Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). It seems however, that the field emphasizes empowerment among the disempowered in powerful countries. Most of the work done in community psychology seems to take place in North America and Western Europe.

However, there seems to be a growing recognition among community psychologists within developed countries that, for community psychology to truly become a proactive movement, community psychologists must become social and political advocates (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Montero, 1997). Community psychology is not just about change within school settings, hospitals, and group homes as discrete, compartmentalized, and de-contextualized settings. Local and global politics, economics, and social arenas are also areas where community psychologists can effect change within macro level contexts. Looking for the paradoxes (Rappaport, 1981) and inconsistencies between ideals and practices (Prilleltensky, 1994; Rosa, 1997) is indicative of the field's self-reflective nature. There is a greater need for recognizing systems of oppression and modes of emancipation within the field (Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997). Support for older persons in Jamaica and other developing nations can happen through political activism at the international level to bring about changes in the structural policies which make it difficult for these countries to adequately provide for their senior citizens. To effect second order change, community psychology must move beyond its comfort zone and expand its borders by becoming more aware of the inequities and injustices taking place in different locations globally. I feel that my study contributes to this awareness, since no previous community psychology study has been done in Jamaica with older persons.

Capacity-building is an approach used within community psychology (Albee et. al., 1988)

that has been, due to necessity, a practice within developing nations who have limited resources, such as Jamaica. I feel that the field has much to learn from the capacity building strategies that people in developing nations use to create resources. The seniors in this study demonstrated their resourcefulness in developing human and material resources. Similarly, one of the means by which community psychologists in their roles as facilitators, advocates and community developers address social psychological issues is through capacity building. In capacity building, communities gain the tools they need to strengthen their capacity to provide necessary health, social, and economic resources. Community psychologists interested in supporting the community development work of seniors in the third world must look at the record of this work. Fortunately for interested parties, there is a growing body of community development work with older persons that exists and to which my study contributes.

As stated earlier, community psychology's values are social and distributive justice, self-determination and participation, human diversity, caring and compassion, and health (Prilleltensky, 1994; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Rappaport, 1994, Trickett et al., 1994). To this list of values, I would like to add the value of the collective, in light of the findings of this study. In this research, Jamaican elders spoke about their value for the collective exemplified by stating, "we live as one." They understood the power of unity and the collective in effecting change. Perhaps there is an implicit understanding of this power in community psychology. Prilleltensky and Nelson (1997), however, suggest that there is an understated emphasis on individual empowerment and person-centred change in community psychology (p. 175). A micro-level analysis with a skewed vision of individuals out of context reduces the explanation of community participation among the participants to a collection of disconnected life stories with no common threads. My belief is that community

empowerment resides within the power of the collective. Implicit within the concept of the collective is the idea regarding unity. Somehow, there is a political connotation to the concept of unity. Fox and Prilleltensky (1997) claimed that most psychologists avoid all that is political in the futile endeavour of creating a value free science. Exploring the concepts of unity and collectivism will encourage us to look at the political realm of psychological experience. Recognizing the individual or collective orientation within a setting or cultural context is useful in understanding the community processes that do or do not occur and provides us additional contextual information from which to view these processes. Through this research, I attempted to initiate some discussion on the role of collectivism and individualism which is useful in our work with communities.

This research with older Jamaicans contributes to the literature on cultural diversity within community psychology by examining the role of culture in individuals' community involvement. Trickett, Watts and Birman (1994) called for community psychology to become more inclusive, embrace diversity, and include the voices of marginalized peoples within research and theory. My study adds to the literature not only by adding the voices of a few Jamaicans, but also by presenting a complex cultural perspective which was absent from the field. For example, I explored the embedded nature of Jamaican culture by drawing reference to its African roots, its identity within the Caribbean geopolitical region, its connection to the Americas, and its place within the larger African diaspora. In addition, I utilized indigenous data-gathering methods, for example story-telling and testifying, thus expanding the repertoire of research tools within community psychology. Furthermore, the older persons I interviewed added an age-related perspective to the field in that the voices of older persons have also been marginalized within the field. Thus, the present study adds to the developing body of literature on cultural diversity and age-related marginalization within

community psychology by including cultural and age-related points of view of older persons in Jamaica and by utilizing a culturally relevant methodology.

Although, many of community psychology interventions are ameliorative at best, the prevention of social problems is an ideal (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997). Within the field there seems to be a tendency toward prevention work with children and youth, or toward studying and preventing recidivism and relapse among adults (Burman, 1997). There is little in the way of prevention work with older persons, despite, the fact that older persons who are particularly vulnerable, that is those elders who are poor, socially isolated, live in unsafe homes and neighbourhoods, and who suffer from disease or disability are at risk and should be included in prevention efforts. However the current study showed that older Jamaicans were engaged in prevention efforts in terms of social isolation, malnutrition, and injury. Thus, my research contributes to the area of prevention work within the older population within community psychology.

**Future Directions.** Functions performed by community psychologists include facilitating the identification of community needs and resources, documenting community processes such as capacity building and outcomes such as access to resources, improved life circumstances, and empowerment. Yet community psychology which professes to concern itself with ideas of distributive justice and advocating on behalf of marginalized peoples, was not present in the body of work on English-speaking Caribbean. Although the community development work done with Caribbean elders falls within the area of community psychology, the voices and experiences of these elders was not present in community psychology. The location of community psychology training programs outside the Caribbean influences the choice of study populations. Thus, politics and convenience influence the inclusion of Caribbean peoples in the research process. It is rather an



expensive venture to do research outside the country where you reside and study. Funding is a challenge, and North American and European journals do not often publish works by Caribbean researchers (Eldemire, personal communications, July 21, 1998). Consequently, Caribbean scholars have created and utilized other avenues for disseminating their work with each other and others who are interested. I have yet to come across any articles in community psychology by persons working with communities in the English-speaking Caribbean. Community psychologists can take an active part in bridging the span between the English-speaking Caribbean, North American, and European researchers by simply acknowledging that the two latter parties occupy a hegemony over the former. Only by acknowledging this inequity can any meaningful discourse commence.

There is so much that community psychologists could gain from involvement with and documenting the community processes within the Caribbean. From the cultural wealth of the peoples and the intellectual insights to be gained by working in collaboration with Caribbean scholars and practitioners, the field of community psychology could become much more diversified, comprehensive, expansive and effective field. Communities could benefit from the field's openness to new approaches, social justice values, and a community development focus of theorists and practitioners. Unlike many other human service fields, community psychology encourages intra disciplinary self-reflection and critical analysis. Historically, North American and European researchers have done a disservice to the Caribbean, by misinterpreting the experiences of Caribbean people, by either not involving them in the research process, not engaging in change work, or by not understanding their contexts and values. **Future research.** As I have spent considerable time in describing the cultural context in which the older persons in this research are situated, an intra-African diaspora/cross-cultural research project examining global economic trends in light of current

policies for older persons is a potential research project. Examining community participation, capacity-building and the role of culture intra-African Diaspora cross-culturally is another possible project in the future. To explore the interplay of culture, context and social aging, I would recommend conducting a comparative study exploring the social aging process with Caribbean peoples residing in Canada and in the Caribbean. During the analysis of the testimonies, motherhood and employment outside the home emerged as a theme. Five of the participants in this study were women who while rearing their children also were employed outside the home, yet continued their community work. However, the roles and sites for this work were centred around support in the church, as their children could be involved as well. Although, I did not explore the theme of community participation among employed mothers in the current discussion, I think that this is a valid and important area for future investigation. Similarly, the gender divide in the division of labour emerged as women were employed in service or teaching roles, while the only man in the study was engaged in commerce. Similarly, a gender divide was noticeable in seniors' groups and in the types of volunteer activities in which female participants were involved. The gender divide in both employment, voluntarism, and community activities are areas requiring further investigation.

**Strengths and weaknesses of this study.** This study is subjective in that it reflects a perspective that is value laden and value rich. The perspective put forth in this research reflects an African-centred and Diasporic African world view, and as an African-Jamaican-Canadian woman it is also my world view. I use of a culturally relevant research paradigm reflecting the African-Jamaican culture of the people with whom I conducted this study. African-Jamaican-Christian culture informed the data collection methods I utilized. Thus, I used testimonies to explore a community

psychological experiences with the elders. Therefore, it incorporated indigenous methods to amplify the voices of a marginalized population, older Jamaicans.

By linking Jamaica with its larger contexts, that is, the Americas, the Caribbean (English-speaking), and the African Diaspora, I proposed an Afrocentric alternative to the traditional Eurocentric perspective from which to view community participation and social aging. Thus, my research adds another set of voices to cry for greater diversity within community psychology by emphasizing the role of culture in community experiences and exploring aging as a community process. The analysis included references to wider contextual issues that impact on the participants' lives, such as structural adjustment, neo-colonialism, race, gender, and class that served to contextualize the community experiences of the elders involved.

In addition, this study challenges the individualist emphasis within community psychology theory, by posing the inclusion of the concepts of unity and collectivism in community psychology discourse. The initiation of a discourse on individualism and collectivism within community, places the study within the realm of critical theory. Furthermore, this study adds to the emerging area of research with older persons in community psychology focussed on non-institutionalized seniors.

Finally, I as a researcher who shared cultural background with participants, I could use my cultural knowledge to probe questions that only an insider would know to ask. In addition, being researcher, born and raised outside of Jamaica allowed me enough distance to have a global perspective on these Jamaican elders' experiences.

In conducting an exploratory study such as this one, generalizability is not a goal of sampling. As a convenience sample, the older persons in this study may not have been representative of the entire population of older persons in Jamaica. In gaining access to these individuals through the

National Council for Senior Citizens, the sample may actually be skewed toward those individuals who are predisposed to participating in the community through formal groups. Thus, the findings of this study are not generalizable to the population of older persons in Jamaica, but are limited to the persons who participated in this study. The voices of politically active seniors were absent from this research.

**What I gained from this study:**

The people in this study demonstrated a certain tenacity and resilience which often goes unnoticed when we look at older persons. They reminded me that they are a great resource filled with years of experience, knowledge, wisdom, and time. However, I was saddened to see frail women, going off to work in the homes of the wealthy. Yet, when these seniors told me their stories with pride in their voice and a sparkle in their eyes, I was rejuvenated. Their undaunted spirits had seen and lived ways made out of no ways -- stories echoed throughout the diasporic experience of Africans. As a community psychologist of Jamaican parents of African descent, doing this study blessed me with an eagle's eye, view for I had the vantage point of viewing two parts of the diasporic world. This eagle's eye perspective allowed me to see commonalities and differences between elders there and here. The commonalities observed begged the question of their origin which led me to the root -- African cultural, spiritual, and community values. My interpretation of what participants told me hopefully will inspire other community psychologists to become involved in work in the Caribbean for the benefit of Caribbean peoples. I hope that my efforts will be a building block, bridging the gap between knowledge generated in the Caribbean and disseminated outside of it. Although community psychology emphasizes relatedness, connection, and reciprocal empowerment -- the very values expressed and lived by the people in this study. To work with Jamaican seniors, practitioners would need to understand their community values.

The older persons in this study seemed to have an overall sense of wellbeing due to their continued involvement in the community, despite physical and financial challenges. They were active in addressing social isolation experienced by shut in seniors in their communities. The elders' testimonies revealed that they experienced a psychological sense of community. Their empowerment

was derived from their relationships with neighbours, family and friends in their seniors' clubs and in their churches. These relationships were characterized by communion, cooperation, and faith. Action, culture, community, and faith are the premises upon which the empowerment the elders' empowerment is built.

### **Conclusion**

Ally, Bych, Lanni, Mrs. Frankson, Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. W., Mrs. Murray, and Mr. Gordon are exemplars of community participation. Their values for community, sharing, giving, and love for others was spread over the course of their lifetimes within a variety of settings and through the many roles they played in the community. Participation to these elders meant sharing, fellowship, and involvement. Community entailed cooperation and unity. In my opinion, the individuals in this study exemplify praxis, the congruence between ideals and action, the unification of "soul and method" in their psychological sense of community, participation, self-determination, democratic participation, and empowerment. Empowerment was a personal experience involving the communion they enjoyed with community and their faith in God. These Jamaican elders live community psychology.

These eight Jamaican elders demonstrated the ability of older persons to change in order to adjust to the aging process within their own lives and that of their communities. My argument here is that, had this been a representative sample, I would not find that these individuals are unique within a country such as Jamaica. For example, Rawlin's (1989) and Eldemire's (1997a) research revealed that older Jamaican women are active in their families and in a variety of community settings. Similar to the findings presented in this thesis, many seniors continue to work past retirement age. Thus, the experience of growing old within a third-world Caribbean context refutes the idea of older persons as non-contributing inactive members of society -- people who are liability rather than an asset. The older persons whom I interviewed were engaged in capacity building and community development.

Aging within a Jamaican cultural context may be very similar to aging in other cultural contexts which share with Jamaica the history of the forced migration and enslavement of Africans. Within most African cultures older persons were valued for their ability to share their knowledge of the past and were often the elders within society (Ayittey, 1991). In some African societies, older persons were the village elders or formed a gerontocracy, a ruling class comprising older persons, however usually male (ibid.). During slavery, elders too old for working the fields provided child care. While the findings of this study may not be unique to the individuals interviewed, I argue that there are particular elements in the *evolving* sociocultural and historical entity of Jamaica that has shaped the experience of older persons of that country. This is not to say that some of these sociocultural and historical elements such as the enslavement of Africans, forced migration, colonialism, racism, and economic subjugation are unique to Jamaica, but that these experiences in the historical context of Jamaica have produced somewhat different outcomes for older persons there. Some of these points, such as health outcomes, economic outcomes, and social outcomes were presented in the introduction. However, as mentioned above, the means to these outcomes have been due in part to the activism, advocacy, and agency of older persons in Jamaica who through their participation have been empowered, and having been empowered, inspire and empower others.

From a global perspective, there are political, social, economic, and philosophical structures that exist and compete. The structures which have the greatest weight and influence are those which would have people disconnected from each other and their community, such as capitalism, individualism, neo-liberalism, and modernism. Simple acts of relating, communing, or as in the words of the participants in this study, "sharing," have the power to transform these



structures. Thus, unity, sharing, cooperation, involvement, relationship, and helping -- all of these activities are revolutionary acts. The seniors in this study may not openly have expressed their political positions or did not make statements as to their political ideology, however, in their actions they took ideological and political stances. The text reads cooperation; the subtext reads resistance. I come to this analysis by making the statement that religion reflects culture, ideology and concepts of power. All peoples have an analysis, a perspective on their view of reality based upon how they experience it and come to agreement on what that reality is. The act of agreement or consensus on what is reality is political, reflecting power structures and relations, and it expresses the ideological and philosophical stances of those who rule, whether they are the few or the masses.

What is central to the process of creating and participating in community carried out by the participants in this study are the values for collective effort and collective outcomes which are inspired by personal faith, cultural legacies, and contextual reality. Furthermore, community participation among older Jamaicans is symbolic of resistance against age-related oppression. In order to recognize this form of resistance, we must "readjust our sense of the rules of resistance and the limits of power" (Smith in Sistren, 1987, p. 2). Older persons must not lose sight of the important roles which they have always played in Jamaica and throughout the diaspora, while envisioning and creating new roles for themselves which benefit the collective. Class division and oppression still exist in Jamaica. In order to sustain life and overcome hardship would have required that people come together and cooperate. These older individuals can show younger generations, who may not know what it is for a community to struggle and strive together, the power that the collective holds.

I learned that the community involvements of the elders currently have evolved out of a legacy of cultural and religious-based responses to the racial oppression encountered by Africans in the Americas and indeed the rest of the diaspora. They exhibited unity in the face of adversity. Their source of empowerment was spiritual; the same source which inspires their deeds. These eight African-Jamaican Christian individuals, parents, grand and great-grandparents, wives, husband, sisters, brother and friends, shared personal, private, and public parts of themselves with me and so with you the reader. For this I am eternally grateful and my field of study is enriched!

**“Clap mi now, mi dun!”**

**(Louise Bennett, Jamaican Cultural Folklorist)**

**Sankofa**

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## **Appendix A. Information Letter**

This letter is to invite you to participate in a study regarding older people's participation in community life in Jamaica. I, Jacqueline Russell, will be conducting this research Jacqueline Russell under the supervision of Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

The purpose of this study is to understand the role that community participation plays in the life of older persons who are active in their community within Jamaica. To do this, I will be interviewing older persons regarding their community activities and roles. The intended use of this study will be to show some examples of how seniors in Jamaica are involved in community efforts and the influences this has on their lives. I will take care not to intrude into your private matters. However, it is my hope that the conversation during the interview will be candid and reveal some insights about your experience in community work and you feelings about your role(s) in the community.

Should you agree to participate in this study I will tape our conversation and take observational notes during the interview. I must seek your consent prior to an interview with you. This will ensure that you understand your rights as a participant in the study. The consent form is attached.

As researchers working with human beings, students of community psychology are bound by a code of ethics approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Senate. These include the following points:

1. **Informed Consent:** I must obtain your informed and voluntary consent prior to an interview. Consent is required regarding the ethical use of interview data and written notes. Your consent gives me permission to use all the data gathered except those parts that you designate as confidential or where the names of other people enter our conversation. You may decline to participate at any time. You may withdraw your consent at any time.
2. **Privacy:** I am required to respect your privacy and maintain confidentiality. To maintain anonymity I will use a pseudonym of your choice. However, should you wish your identity to be known, I will honour your request.
3. **Inconvenience or Risks:** There is no risk involved in the study you will be participating in. I anticipate that a two-hour interview will be an inconvenience to you and pose an interruption in your schedule. However, I will be flexible and attempt to fit your schedule and agree to interview you at a place that is comfortable.
4. **Disposition of Data:** The interview tapes, written notes and consent forms will be held by me and stored in a locked file at Wilfrid Laurier University in the psychology department until June 30, 2000. I will be the only person who will have access to the file drawer. After June 30, 2000, the tapes will be destroyed or returned to you at your request. I will obtain your permission to use your words in the study, if I need to quote what you have stated in the interview. If this study is to be published, I will seek your permission prior to publication.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at \_\_\_\_\_ where I will be staying in Jamaica until July 29, 1998. After July 29, 1998, I may be reached at (519)725-7551, Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers at (519)884-1970, ext. 3630, or Paul Davock, the Field Placement Supervisor, at (519)884-1970, ext. 3088. You may also address your questions, concerns, or comments in writing to the following:

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Wilfrid Laurier University  
75 University Avenue West  
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N2L 3C5

Paul Davock, Field Placement Supervisor  
Psychology Department  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
75 University Avenue West  
Waterloo, Ontario  
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I will also give you feedback on the study in the form of a written summary to be mailed to you by June 30, 1999.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Russell  
Researcher  
Wilfrid Laurier University

**Appendix B.  
Consent Form**

I have met with the researcher, Jacqueline Russell, who has asked me to participate in her research study. I understand that this research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers, Psychology Department, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

The purpose of this study is to learn about older persons' experience in community participation, activism and empowerment in Jamaica. The researcher has informed me that the information that I will provide will contribute towards an understanding of the role community participation in the lives of some older Jamaicans.

I understand that the interview will be tape recorded and that the researcher will also be making written notes on what she observes throughout the interview. The researcher has explained that she will spend approximately two hours speaking with me and ask questions during the interview regarding my participation in community activities.

The researcher has informed me that there are no risks involved in my participating in this study. There may be a minimal inconvenience in the disruption of my daily schedule. The researcher has informed me that she will accommodate my schedule and interview me at a location convenient to me. I also have been informed that I am free to contact the investigator at the telephone number listed below if I have any questions.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that as a participant in this study, I will have an opportunity to withdraw from the study anytime by stopping the interview. I understand that my refusal to participate in this study will take place without any penalty to me or loss of benefits to which I would be entitled through this study. I understand that I may refuse to answer any question that the researcher asks anytime. Jacqueline Russell has given me a number where I may contact her while she is in Jamaica.

The researcher has explained that my identity will be kept anonymous and confidential, and that for this purpose a pseudonym will be used to distinguish between participants. Personal matters and the names of other individuals other than myself will be held confidential by the researcher. I understand that confidential matters will not be included as part of the data.

Please indicate your agreement to the following by placing a check mark in the appropriate space:

I have chosen the pseudonym by which my identity will be concealed.      Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I do not wish to have my identity concealed and wish to have my name revealed. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I understand that the interview tapes will be kept confidential and that I will not be identified in any publication or discussion, unless it is my desire to be named. The interview tapes, written notes and consent forms will be held by the researcher and stored in a locked file at Wilfrid Laurier University

in the psychology department until June 30, 2000. Only the researcher will have access to the file drawer. After June 30, 2000, the tapes will be destroyed or returned to me at my request. The researcher will obtain my permission to use my words in her study, if she needs to quote what I have stated in the interview with her.

I understand that I have a right to have all of my questions about the study answered by the researcher or research advisor in sufficient detail to clearly understand the answer.

I understand that I will receive feedback in the form of a written summary of the findings from the researcher by June 30, 2000.

If I have any questions about the study, the interview, my rights, or any other items related to the study, I will contact Jacqueline Russell at (519) 725-7551, Dr. Walsh-Bowers at (519)884-1970, ext. 3630, or Paul Davock who is the Field Placement Supervisor, who oversees the participation of people in psychology research at Wilfrid Laurier University at 884-1970, ext. 3088. I may contact the individuals name above by writing to them at Psychology Department, Wilfrid Laurier University, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, N2L 3R9.

I have read this letter describing the project. I acknowledge receiving a copy of this informed consent.

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**Researcher**

Jacqueline Russell, Researcher  
 Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers, Thesis Supervisor  
 (519)884-1970, ext. 3630

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**Participant**

### **Appendix C. Interview Guide**

1. **What involvements have you had in the community?**
2. **What role(s) did you play?**
3. **What motivated you to get involved in these activities?**
4. **Describe your feelings about these involvements?**
5. **What was the outcome of your involvement?**
6. **How do you think the community receives your involvement?**
7. **What value is placed on your involvement by others in the community?**
8. **What does activism mean to you?**
9. **What does community mean to you?**
10. **What does participation mean to you?**
11. **What connections do you see between community, participation, and activism?**
12. **Are you old?**
13. **Who is old?**
14. **What does being old mean to you, to the people in the community?**
15. **Does your age or stage in life have anything to do with your involvement in the community?**

**Appendix D.**  
**Roles - Community Involvement as Youth Table 1.**

<b>Teacher / Counsellor</b>	<b>Advocate</b>
<p>Mrs. Murray: - taught Sunday School</p> <p>Ally: - taught sewing and crafts to youth at the National Volunteer Organization.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - taught Sunday School</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson: - taught in a rural school</p>	
<b>Leader</b>	<b>Supporter / Member</b>
<p>Ally: - led youth at the National Volunteer Organization.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - church school class leader - President for the Girls League.</p> <p>Mr. Sterling: - farmer with his father - operated a coal business with his father</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson: - prize winning athlete and cultivator.</p>	<p>Ally: - member of the local YWCA</p> <p>Lanni: - 4H Club Member</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - choir member at church.</p> <p>Mrs. Murray: - church choir member</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson: - Member of the Juvenile Agricultural - member of school and church choirs</p>

**Roles: Community Involvement as Adults Table 2.**

<b>Teacher / Counsellor</b>	<b>Advocate</b>
<p>Mrs. Frankson: - was a teacher at Kingston Technical with thirty years of teaching experience.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - was a teacher in a local high school.</p> <p>Lanni: - taught Sunday school.</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - taught Sunday School.</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - was a teacher</p> <p>- religious instructor in church.</p> <p>Ally: - taught children CPR and crafts through the Social Development Council.</p>	<p>Mrs. Frankson: - worked to address the needs of students who were neglected and physically abused by parents / guardians.</p> <p>- foster parent to 15+ children</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - was a child protection officer in her capacity as a social worker.</p> <p>- foster parent.</p>
<b>Leader</b>	<b>Supporter / Member</b>
<p>Mr. Gordon - was an acolyte in the Anglican Church and God father to over 30 children.</p> <p>- captain of his cricket team</p> <p>- was a cane planter and store owner</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch - Sunday school superintendent</p>	<p>Bych: - member of Jamaica Labour Party</p> <p>- member of a local lodge.</p> <p>- church member</p> <p>Mr. Gordon: - was a member of the Jamaica Labour Party.</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson: - assisted her husband in his business and worked with him in the community.</p> <p>- active member of a political party.</p> <p>- member of teachers' union</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - member of the Jamaica Agricultural Society and 4H Club.</p> <p>- church organist</p> <p>- minister's wife</p> <p>Lanni: - 4H Club member</p> <p>- member of the Mother's Union in the church.</p> <p>Mrs. Murray: - Member of the Mothers' Union in the Anglican church.</p> <p>- acted in church plays.</p>

**Roles: Community Involvement as Older Persons Table 3.**

<b>Teacher / Counsellor</b>	<b>Advocate</b>
<p>Mrs. Frankson: - Substitute Teacher Volunteer - Kingston Technical HS where she taught. - Sabbath School Teacher - School</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - Teacher</p> <p>Mr. Gordon: - Counsellor - in his local community through his position in the church.</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - Family court counsellor - Religious Instructor in the Catholic Church.</p> <p>Ally: - teaches crafts and first aid to club members.</p> <p>Mr. Gordon: - counselling as an acolyte</p>	<p>Ally: - fought to re-open a local clinic as an activist</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - on behalf of seniors and youth in her community - foster mother</p> <p>Lanni: - initiated the senior citizens' club in her area due to inadequate attention to seniors in her area by the local Citizen's Association. - provides foster care.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - initiated senior citizens' club in her Antrim Gardens Seniors' Club</p>
<b>Leader</b>	<b>Supporter / Member</b>
<p>Ally: - President and founder - St. Andrew's Senior Citizens' Club and signing officer at the executive level. - a church mother.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - former president and founder Antrim Garden's Senior Citizens' church steward</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson: - Advisor to church board - vice president - Antrim Gardens' Senior Citizen's Club</p> <p>Lanni: - founder Senior's Club - enrolling member Mothers' Union - Anglican Church</p> <p>Mr. Gordon: - builder - donated land and material to build his church. - Justice of the Peace - mediator</p> <p>Mrs. W.: - president - August Town Senior Citizens' Club - National Council Executive Member</p> <p>Mr. Gordon: - People's National Party Chairperson.</p>	<p>Lanni: - 4H Club member in local area - sings in church choir</p> <p>Ally: - an usher in her church - craft worker for her seniors club</p> <p>Bych: - member of the Prayer Role in her church. - youth chaperone in her church. - member of the Olympic Park Senior Citizen's Association.</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch: - relief organist at church, relief choir director.</p>



**Meanings Table 4.**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Participation</b></p> <p>Involvement          Taking part in . . .          Fellowship          Be together          Being available          Passing on what you have been given          Sharing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Community</b></p> <p>Cooperation          Involvement with people in a geographic location          Unity          Relationship          Sharing          Help people</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Activism</b></p> <p>Activity          To take an active part</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connection between Community Participation and Activism</b></p> <p>We must love in order to be active and participate in community.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Old - Self Definitions of Older Persons</b></p> <p>Seventy plus years          A state of physical decline - loss of senses          A time to get religion          A natural process          A necessary part of life          "You're as old as you feel."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Old - Community's Definitions as perceived by Older Persons</b></p> <p>A time when people just sit down and do nothing and watch grandchildren          Proud          Grey hair          Respectable          Walk slow</p>

Settings Table 5.

<b>Settings</b>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Home</b></p> <p>All of the participants were parents, or foster parents and are now grand parents.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Education</b></p> <p>All of the participants were involved in extracurricular activities as students in primary and / or secondary school. Mrs. Frankson, Mrs. Lynch, Mrs. W were all teachers in Jamaica's primary or secondary school systems, and had therefore received some level of post-secondary education. Ally was a volunteer crafts, sewing, and CPR instructor.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Employment</b></p> <p>All of the participants were employed outside the home.</p> <p>Lanni was a dietitian's aid.</p> <p>Bych was a domestic worker and a higgler, and continued to sell her produce.</p> <p>Mr. Gordon was an entrepreneur, cultivator, and construction worker.</p> <p>W was a teacher and was still a counsellor.</p> <p>Mrs. Frankson was a secondary school teacher</p> <p>Mrs. Lynch continued to work as a teacher.</p> <p>Mrs. Murray was a domestic worker</p> <p>Ally was a seamstress</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Church</b></p> <p>All of the participants were raised in the church where they took on various roles through the auxiliaries. Their involvement in church continued through adulthood and still continued as older adults.</p>

## Appendix E.

### Glossary

ah	= I
anodda	= another
bitta	= bitter
butleress	= domestic worker, personal assistant
callaloo	= Jamaican spinach similar to collard greens
de	= the
deh	= there
dem	= them
dere	= there
dese	= these
dey	= they
dinna	= dinner
dis	= this
faada	= father
fah	= for as in “Wheh yuh go deh fah?” or “What did you go there for?”
fahm	= form
fi	= for (possessive) as in “fi ar sinting” “ or “her thing”
fift	= fifth

<b>Grater Cake/ cut cake</b>	<b>= Jamaican confectionary made with coconut, ginger, molasses or brown sugar then boiled similar to peanut brittle, but not as hard.</b>
<b>higglas</b>	<b>= Market sellers, usually women.</b>
<b>inna</b>	<b>= in</b>
<b>layba</b>	<b>= labour</b>
<b>likkle</b>	<b>= little</b>
<b>marina</b>	<b>= undershirt</b>
<b>matta</b>	<b>= matter</b>
<b>mi</b>	<b>= my or mine</b>
<b>modda</b>	<b>= mother</b>
<b>murma</b>	<b>= murmur</b>
<b>nah</b>	<b>= don't</b>
<b>neva</b>	<b>= never</b>
<b>nuh</b>	<b>= no</b>
<b>nuttin'</b>	<b>= nothing</b>
<b>ole</b>	<b>= old</b>
<b>oonu</b>	<b>= all of you</b>
<b>out-a-door</b>	<b>= outside</b>
<b>ova</b>	<b>= over</b>
<b>owna</b>	<b>= owner</b>

**Pardna** = Informal savings system where as little as 6 people enter into agreement to deposit a set amount of funds [your 'hand']. Each member of the pardna [each partner] has an opportunity to collect 100% of the total pardna which consists of all the money put in by all the members within a round [the total number of weeks it takes for each partner to collect the pardna]. The total amount of the pardna is equal to number of partners multiplied by the set amount of deposit. Members or partners may decide to advance loans against the pardna to a partner who needs cash prior to their turn to collect the pardna. Thus, this system of mutual savings is built upon trust.

<b>pawt</b>	= part
<b>pon</b>	= upon, on
<b>seh</b>	= say, said
<b>si</b>	= see
<b>siddung</b>	= sit down
<b>sinting</b>	= thing
<b>stran</b>	= strand
<b>teef / teefin'</b>	= steal / stealing
<b>Trupance</b>	= Three penny, threepence, thruppence
<b>whch</b>	= where
<b>wi</b>	= we

**wid / wit**

**= with**

**yah**

**= here**

**yuh**

**= you or yours**